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# THE GOSPEL AND THE MODERN MIND

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WALTER ROBERT MATTHEWS, M.A., D.D.





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# THE GOSPEL AND THE MODERN MIND

BY

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TO MY KIND HOSTS IN AMERICA  
AND PARTICULARLY TO

JAMES WARREN LANE

*Senior Warden of St. Bartholomew's Church  
New York*



## PREFACE

In the summer of 1924 I preached a course of sermons with the title of this book, in St. Bartholomew's Church, New York. They seemed to meet the needs of some hearers and on this account I listened to the suggestion that they should be published. What is written for oral delivery is rarely fit for reading at leisure and I have therefore put the material which I used in the sermons into the form of a series of chapters without, I hope, forgetting that the audience which I am trying to reach, though now unseen, is of the same kind as that for which the sermons were intended. This little book is, in fact, an essay in popular theology. It is meant to interest educated men and women, who, without being experts in science or philosophy, have adopted what we vaguely call the "modern" view of the world. I am sure that many such people are gravely perplexed about religion and my ambition has been to help them in the only way in which one mind can

truly help another, by setting down as clearly and candidly as possible its own thoughts. I claim no more for these chapters than that each represents an effort to think out again the particular problem with which it deals.

Popular theology is not necessarily bad theology; but it must from its very nature be imperfect. All theology must rest (so at least I believe) in the last resort on a philosophical basis, but in a book such as this it is impossible to enter deeply into metaphysical discussions. I will therefore forestall a criticism by admitting that there are many places where I have passed over topics which I saw no way to treat without departing from the plan of the book. If any reader should have a curiosity to know how I would state the philosophical ground of Christianity I must refer him to my Boyle Lectures, "Studies in Christian Philosophy." The conclusions which I have maintained in that book form, in fact, the background of what is written here.

Experience leads me to attempt to forestall another kind of criticism. There are always people who criticise a book by pointing out what it does not contain. It may be well,

therefore, to state, what is obvious, that these chapters do not profess to be an outline of Christian theology, nor are they a complete account of the author's religious beliefs. They essay to discuss some fundamental affirmations of the Gospel in the light of modern thought, and I put them forth in the hope that they may be of some little service in commending the eternal truths of religion to the mind of the present age.





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CHAPTER I: The Modern Mind and the  
Eternal Mind



## CHAPTER I: The Modern Mind and the Eternal Mind

THERE is no statement which would find more ready assent than the assertion that all is not well with religion in our modern world. To some this fact is no cause for regret. They see in it the symptoms of the passing away of illusions and superstitions which have impeded man in his search for happiness on this earth. It is not to those that these pages are primarily addressed. Rather I have in mind those who have the firm conviction that without religion human life must become tragically impoverished, but who are perplexed by the difficulty of commending the Gospel to their contemporaries and by the obstacles which they find in their own minds when they strive to make their Christian faith a living motive force. Is it not true that for us religion seems often remote from the affairs of daily concern? Is there not something over and above the natural

resistance of the unregenerate man to the call to a higher life, something that makes it specially hard for us to be Christians?

A common way of describing the situation is to say that the teaching of the Christian faith is out of harmony with the "modern mind." This is a good expression because it suggests that the trouble is more deeply seated than many people suppose. We sometimes meet the man who thinks that our difficulties come from what he vaguely calls the "higher criticism," and that if we could return to the time when Genesis was taken literally and the existence of errors in the Gospels was inconceivable we should have solved our problem. This kind of view is quite inadequate. The phenomena which it points to as the causes of the difficulty are in fact only symptoms of the real disease. The truth is that the mind, the general outlook upon the world and the common assumptions made about it have changed profoundly during the past century and a half, so that our habits of thought are widely different not only from those of the writers of the New Testament but from those of the men who drew up our statements of doctrine and our forms of worship.

We shall really have to consider the "modern mind."

I can understand that any one with a slight taste for paradox might here interject a denial that there is such a thing as the modern mind at all. A plausible case could be made for the view that the only characteristic feature of the modern mind is that it has no existence as a common mind. We must confess that the salient feature of the present intellectual and moral situation is the absence of any universally accepted principles of thought and action. The distinguished Alsatian theologian, Albert Schweitzer, has recently emphasised this fact as the great danger to western civilisation. And it is certainly true that when we compare our own age with any previous one we are impressed by its baffling complexity. If we contrast it with the Middle Ages, for example, we find that then, in a large measure, every one assumed certain principles as beyond question. There was much intellectual activity, but it was within the framework of accepted assumptions. It is true that the Renaissance and the Reformation shook this common mind of Christendom, but they did not totally destroy it. There

remained certain large agreements which transcended the broken outward unity. Take any chance collection of men of average education to-day: is there any belief about the world which you can confidently expect will be shared by all? You would not be in the least surprised if your collection comprised a Fundamentalist, a Modernist, a Christian Scientist and an Agnostic.

If we are to find a modern mind we must be a little more definite in our idea of what we are looking for. Walter Bagehot somewhere has a suggestive remark on this subject. He says that if you could take a cross section of the population it would give you a whole series of strata illustrating the history of the human mind, just as a cross section of rock may illustrate for the geologist the history of the earth. At the lowest level there are people whose modes of thought scarcely differ from those of primitive man, others are in the mental condition of barbarians, and so upward until we come to the small topmost layer—the minority who have reached the highest development and on whom the next stratum in the series will be built. The modern mind does not mean the



mind of all the men who are alive at the present moment; it means the thought of those who are, so to speak, the spear point of the onward march of intellect, those whose conceptions will mould the structure of the future. When we define the modern mind in this manner we may hope to reach some clearer notion of the problem before us and sum up more definitely the peculiar features of the modern outlook.

Obviously the most important influence that has differentiated our minds from those of all former generations is the rise and development of natural science. It is one of the most perplexing of historical riddles that science had to wait so long before it gained any decisive triumph. Its beginnings may be traced back to the dawn of consecutive thought. The foundations were well and truly laid in observation of nature and even experiment by Aristotle. But a blight seemed to settle on the movement; for more than a thousand years man's knowledge of nature remained stationary. It may be that this halt was caused partly by accidental causes. Few people realise the important consequences of the defects of Greek mathematics.

It never occurred to the Greeks to invent a symbol for zero, and the absence of the little figure 0 prevented them from making calculations of any complexity and hence from applying mathematics effectively to the study of the material world. When the new and simpler notation came from the Arabs the mind of Europe had turned to other things. The modern age is the scientific age. Its acutest minds have been turned not within to the life of the spirit but outwards to the material universe. That is the fundamental difference between our era and all others.

The effects of the conclusions of science upon our mental attitude have been sufficiently dwelt upon. I will not retell so old a story, but no account of the modern mind could be conceived which did not make some reference to it. For practical purposes we live in a totally different universe from that which presented itself to the imagination of our forefathers. For us it is no longer the comparatively tidy and imaginable system with the earth at its centre. It is an inconceivably vast, perhaps infinite, system in which the earth holds an insignificant place. Nor does man himself occupy the undisputed

position of dignity which once seemed to belong to him. We see ourselves as the descendants of a long line of animal ancestors. All this is familiar, but it is not therefore unimportant. The theology of the Christian religion was developed when the old view of the universe was taken for granted. We have not yet succeeded in incorporating the new view of the material universe into our Christian thought.

But the influence of scientific method on our habits of thought has been more profound though less obvious than the influence of scientific results. Scientific method takes for granted the absolute continuity of all events. It does not contemplate for a moment the possibility that there could be any happening of any kind which was not related with other events and hence with *all* other events. Everything that occurs can be explained, in the scientific sense, by being brought under a general law which covers a vast number of other events. It is true that this assumption cannot be proved to be accurate. It is possible that the continuity may not be so complete as is assumed. But we can at least admit that the hypothesis has been abundantly justified by its results. It has,

in fact, worked. The universe, before the eyes of two or three generations, has taken shape as a connected and related whole. We are not concerned now with the final truth or real meaning of this principle of continuity; we are discussing the primary and unconscious postulates of the modern mind. The deepest of them is the principle of continuity.

The age in which the Gospel was first preached and the ages which elaborated the Christian theology had not this conception. To them, both pagan and Jew, the order of the world was liable to interruption at any moment by influences from the supernatural. It is difficult for us to grasp the difference which this fact makes between us and them. A gulf which only the most vigorous imaginative effort can bridge separates our mental equipment from that of the earlier centuries.

We shall find, I think, that this word "continuity" is the key to the modern mind. The second formative influence which comes before us for consideration is simply this principle applied to a particular sphere of existence. The growth of the historical sense has had such far-reaching effects that it deserves to be men-

tioned separately, though it is really the extension of the principle of continuity to the affairs of humanity. The modern mind is able to envisage the life of the human race as one whole, and it is unable to cut off one period of history, or one national story, from the rest. Of course it must be admitted by every one that some historical periods are more significant than others. Continuity does not mean reducing all to one dead level. But there can be no sacred reserve within which the historian must veil his eyes. The Biblical narratives, the Christian origins, the life and teaching of Jesus Himself, cannot be discriminated from that which went before and that which happened elsewhere. The New Testament itself is, from this point of view, an episode in the unfinished story of man. Influences from the past come to a head in it. It takes its place in the unbroken stream.

These assumptions about history are natural and indeed inevitable for the educated modern man. It would be an exaggeration to say that the conception of continuity was entirely absent from the ancient world. The Jews have the distinction of making the first approach to a

philosophy of history in the conviction of the Prophets that the fortunes of the nation were determined by the righteous purposes of God. It was a commonplace too of Christian Theology from the earliest time that the Old Testament contained the record of the preparation for the Gospel. Thus there was a thought of continuity deeply implanted in the mind of the early Church. But it was a continuity widely different from that which permeates the thinking of the modern man. It was, so to speak, an external continuity, in the jargon of philosophers a "transcendent" continuity caused by the providential government of a personal God. The continuity, on the other hand, in which we are impelled as modern men to believe is of an "immanent" kind. The connection between all events is a direct one, which needs no reference to a power outside them. It is moreover universal. To the modern mind that which is continuous in the human story is not one line of events but all events. It thinks of the human world not as one clear and golden strand shining out from among tangled and negligible confusion, but of an infinite number of strands all inextricably interwoven forming, if the image may be al-

lowed, the seamless garment of the Time Spirit. Here again a gulf divides us from the men of ancient and mediæval times. No greater effort of the historical imagination could perhaps be made than to transport oneself into the period when the historical imagination did not exist. We find it difficult to enter into the minds of men who saw nothing strange in the idea of an absolutely new beginning, who were neither impressed nor oppressed by the perception of long prepared tendencies and the slow maturing of all human affairs.

Even in a hasty survey like this we cannot wholly pass over the influence of philosophy on the modern outlook. The speculations of philosophers are often far removed from the interest and comprehension of the plain man, but in the long run they penetrate, often in a distorted form, to the intelligence of the multitude. Great thinkers are at once symptoms of the spiritual condition of the age in which they live and creative forces for the ages that come after. It is very hard to sum up the general effects of centuries of thinking, but there is one difference between ancient and modern philosophy which is of great practical

importance. The ancient thinkers and their disciples in the Middle Ages drew no hard distinction between mind and matter or between souls and things. They occupied, generally speaking, the "objective" attitude of science. Souls and minds were for them doubtless the highest types of existence, but they were not set over against all other types of existence, they were regarded as part of the same order. Modern philosophy, to use the word which is so constantly on its lips, has taken the "subjective" standpoint. Descartes set the tone when he based his whole system on the one firm ground that he could find, *cogito ergo sum*—"I think; therefore I am." Modern thought has been haunted by the contrast between the knower and the known, between the world within and the world without, between the subjective and the objective. In this respect the key word "continuity" deserts us. Speculation has sought earnestly to achieve a unity in which this opposition should be overcome, but it has not succeeded. There is a deep dualism in all modern thought. It is often said that the philosophy of the ancient world was infected by incurable dualism, and



it is undeniable that the contrast between the eternal and the temporal was a dominant thought throughout the whole period. But modern philosophy is troubled even more. The contrast between the inner and the outer has been equally persistent and not less intractable. If the dualism to which we are referring had been a mere puzzle of metaphysicians, we might cheerfully leave them to grope in the fog which is supposed to be their natural element, but unfortunately their problem assumes a practical and torturing actuality. There is a note of tragedy in modern literature which reflects the feeling of masses of reflective persons. The indifference of nature, even its apparent hostility, is a constant theme. The natural order seems to stand over against us, indifferent to our desires and aspirations, careless of our values, and in the last resort inexplicable. We know more about nature, but it has not therefore presented itself to us in the guise of a friend. The world of space and time has not as the result of scientific research become more like our home. On the contrary, the opposition between the ideals of mind and the facts of the world has become even more perplexing and

oppressive. No account of the modern mind can be adequate which fails to take account of this skeleton in its cupboard.

The last difference that I will mention between the modern outlook and that of former times is concerned with practice rather than theory. It is a difference in hopes and aims. This contrast might be summed up in the two words "perfection" and "progress." The idea of progress has taken so great a hold of our minds and has entered so deeply into our moral life that we can hardly believe it to be a conception of recent birth. Readers of Professor Bury's "The Idea of Progress" must have been startled to find that it does not come into effective operation until the seventeenth century. What the ancient world desired was not progress but perfection. Its ideal was a condition which could be maintained unaltered, which left nothing more to desire. When Plato, for example, describes his model city in which human life could attain its highest expression, he imagines a state set up by the exercise of the intellect, the perfect state, which did not grow but was made, and which must be maintained against peril of change. The ideals of

the ancient world are static. Not less true is this of those who stood in the Hebrew tradition and looked for the Kingdom of God. Very different as this was from the perfect city of the Greeks in its nature and in the manner of its coming, it has at least this in common—it has nothing to do with progress. It was not to be reached by the steady and intelligent efforts of men of good will. It was not to develop slowly from less to more, built up by patient endeavour. It was to come complete, perfect and final, by an act of God. To us the thought of a perfection which excludes change is not attractive or perhaps even intelligible. Modern Christians have shown that this is the case by the interpretation which they commonly give of Heaven. We rarely hear of it as a place of rest, we often hear of it as a condition of farther growth and higher service. Our aspiration is for untroubled dynamic advance rather than for static perfection. Progress both for the society and for the individual is our common hope. If we think at all of the final and the perfect it is as a guide to progress and not as a satisfying goal.

Even so imperfect a sketch of the character-

istics of the modern mind must have made it clear that the need for the restatement of the Gospel is not fictitious. It has made clear also, it may be hoped, the nature of the restatement which is required. Here is no matter of the removal of antiquated language but the translation of the message from the setting of one "world view" into another which is quite different. The Gospel came to men who had little conception of continuity but were convinced of the reality of the supernatural. It comes to-day to men who are penetrated with the belief in the order of nature and have scarcely any living belief in the supernatural. It came then to people who were almost wholly unaware of the subtle connection of all events in human life. It comes to-day into a world which has learnt that all history is one movement. It came then to an age that had no deep feeling of the contrast between the world of nature and the world of mind. It comes to-day to a generation which is tortured by this conflict. It came then to minds which thought in terms of perfection. It comes now to minds which think in terms of progress.

There is no doubt that the Gospel needs to

be restated: but we shall have to face the possibility that it cannot be done. May not the contrast be too great? Has not the human spirit become so greatly modified that the good news of an earlier time has ceased to have any meaning for us? We must perhaps look for a new evangel, if indeed there is one for us at all.

It is, I think, probable that the full value of the original Gospel cannot be conveyed in terms that are wholly acceptable to modern assumptions. We must beware of assuming that, in that event, the Gospel has been proved false. No idolatry is more absurd than the worship of the modern mind, for it is self-contradictory. It is modern thought itself which has taught us to take no age, and the mind of no age, as final. One thing at least is certain, that the assumptions of the next age will not be the same as ours. There will always be a "wisdom of this world," to which the Gospel must appear as foolishness, and the false wisdom consists partly in mistaking the particular forms of thought and judgments of value which have been forced into the foreground by the circumstances of the time as beyond criticism and finally true. We might

wish that some who are never tired of dwelling on the conflict between religion and modern thought would take to heart this deliverance of their oracle—the relativity of concepts, the changing fashion of our mental instruments. And there is much to be said in criticism of the presuppositions which we have enumerated as peculiarly modern. We could find good reason for holding that the ideas of continuity and progress are inherently imperfect unless they are supplemented by the idea of a Reality which transcends the process and of a Perfection which gives meaning to the advance. But when all this has been said the pressing need of interpreting the Gospel for the mind of to-day remains. We dare not wait until a future age should perhaps be able once again to make the Gospel real to itself. Christ wants to save this generation; and to save it He must be understood by it.

We have something better to offer than mere criticism of the modern outlook. Let us admit that the mode of thought of our generation is remarkably different from that of the first century; still difference and change are not the only features of the life of mind. If that were

so we should be utterly unable to understand the men who went before and would be delivered over to the most dismal scepticism. We can feel our kinship with men of other days, and if we penetrated deeply enough we may find the permanent elements in the human spirit. At the base of the modern mind or any other kind of mind there is the eternal mind, those factors in humanity which do not essentially alter. If we can show that the Gospel is founded not on spiritual fashion but in Spirit itself, we shall have solved our problem and put the manufacturers of new religions out of business. There is a difference of opinion about change in human nature. Plitudinous persons are fond of saying that human nature does not alter; to whom paradoxical persons like Mr. Bernard Shaw reply that it is never doing anything else. Both these parties happen to be right. The mind of man is always changing on the surface, but in its deep springs it does not change.

Three salient respects in which the essential self-identity of the human spirit is manifested seem to call for our notice. First, Reason does not in its nature alter. It is true, as we

have seen, that the general axioms and hypotheses with which reason works vary enormously from time to time, but the principles of Reason are unaltered. We can follow the argument of a philosopher who lived two thousand three hundred years ago as easily and often more easily than that of a thinker whose book was printed yesterday. The demonstrations of Euclid are as valid now as they were when he first set them down. What is not so obvious is that the ultimate problem of Reason does not change. We have allowed it to become obscured by the multiplicity of minor tasks which we have set the intellect to perform. Specialisation has produced a large number of eminent persons who cannot see the wood for the trees. But the wood is there and simple people often see it much better than the learned. The wood is simply the universe. The ultimate problem of Reason is what has been called the "challenge of the universe." The modern man feels the need no less than any other to find some answer to this challenge, to reach some reasonable view of what it all means in order that his life may be adjusted to it. I venture the suggestion that much of the lamented



“decay of religion” is due to the weakening of what we may call the “metaphysical impulse”; in other words, that the chief obstacle to the Gospel is not the presence of the modern mind but the modern absence of mind in the full sense. The Gospel does not appeal to people often because it answers a question which they have forgotten to ask. Nevertheless the question cannot be completely ignored. The challenge of the universe remains the central problem of the intellect. The Christian faith has the outline of a solution.

Secondly, I would boldly affirm that the moral values which men reverence are permanent. I say “boldly” because the relativity of moral ideas has been strongly emphasised in recent times and is a part of the stock in trade of the “enlightened” journalist. The Sociologists and the Anthropologists have attracted a good deal of attention to their researches in the customs of primitive man. We may wonder whether the life of humanity while in its nursery and barbarous school days has not been allowed too much influence in forming our opinions. At least it may be said that we are primarily concerned with man at a compara-

tively full grown condition, in the period during which he has been completely human: and after all we know much more about civilised man than about primitive man. When we take account of humanity in possession of all its faculties the permanent elements in the moral ideal become much more evident. Of course the circumstances and the problems of conduct differ and have an influence on the detailed conception of the virtues, but the qualities of character that men revere have not really changed. The Hebrew Prophet is speaking directly to our conscience when he tells us that we should "do justice and love mercy and walk humbly." So is the Christian Apostle when he describes the fruits of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control." So is the Buddhist King Asoka when he carves his list of virtues: "Compassion, liberality, truth, purity, gentleness, peace, joyousness, saintliness, self-control."\* The gulf of the ages is bridged by the souls that have lived for righteousness. We have then another permanent element in the flux of life—the

\* I owe the conjunction of these two passages to Prof. Irving Babbitt's excellent book, "Democracy and Leadership," p. 159.

world values. When the Gospel appeals to them it is speaking not to the mind that fluctuates but to that eternal mind which transcends the centuries.

Lastly, the needs of the human soul have a strange persistence. Superficially they may seem to change. But if we look at the psychological situation rather than at the words and figures in which it has been expressed, we shall see that in essentials it does not vary. It may be true that "the modern man is not worrying about his sins," and it is certainly true that he is not greatly disturbed by the fear of hell; but he is worrying about his complexes and he is in search of the same kind of deliverance as that which his predecessors were pursuing—the inner peace which can only come from the resolution of conflict and the unification of the self round a satisfying object of love and loyalty. The modern man needs salvation, he needs to be shown a life that is worth living and to obtain the power to live it.

The Gospel, then, though it came first to men and through men whose minds were very different from ours, and was expressed in forms which to us are strange and perhaps, at first

sight, unmeaning, need not therefore be infected by the impermanence of the age in which it appeared. It may appeal to those factors in human nature which are constant, it may be the expression of the Eternal Mind and make its appeal to that unchanging mind which is at the back of all minds. If that were so those teachers of religion who are seeking to free the Gospel from the temporary forms in which it has been clothed are not destructive but conservative. They are performing the work of evangelists by translating the good news out of language which has grown archaic into words which speak directly to the man of to-day.

## CHAPTER II: The Beginning of the Gospel



## CHAPTER II: The Beginning of the Gospel

WE have now to consider the meaning of the Gospel. It might be supposed that the task before us in this chapter was comparatively easy. The modern mind may be difficult to characterise; we may well doubt whether we have succeeded in tracing its subtle ramifications; but the Gospel, we might imagine, will give us no such trouble. Whether it be true or false, there can be surely little doubt about what it is. Unfortunately this natural expectation is not fulfilled. In fact the most complex and fundamental controversies have raged and are still raging round the question, What is Christianity? We should be deceiving ourselves if we thought that these disputes were the affairs of scholars conducting conflicts which have little bearing on practical life. This is not true. The great divisions of Christendom are not, as is often alleged, disagreements about minor points of doctrine. They go down to

deep divergence on the question what Christianity really is. In attempting to find an answer to this question we shall be compelled to divide our inquiry into two parts. First we will ask, What may we gather from the recorded words and works of Jesus concerning the Gospel? Then we may go on to consider some of the interpretations of the Apostles.

We may at least be confident that Christianity from the moment of its first appearance in the world claims to be a Gospel—the good news of God. The earliest record of the life of Jesus opens with the word as giving the key to its aim and contents. The books of the New Testament, which represent to us the period immediately following the death of Jesus, strike the same note. Differing from one another as they do in outlook, in phraseology, and in habits of thought, all the writers of the New Testament are men filled with the conviction that they have good news of God to announce. And further, they indicate to us not less surely the spirit of the community for which they wrote. The Ecclesia, the congregation of Christian people, is the company of those who have received a message from the Eternal and



are passing it on. The later history of the Christian religion presents us with a chequered story. That glad consciousness of good news which invests the early years of our religion with the joyousness and hope of spring has frequently faded away, and the congregation of Christ's people has sometimes become a body of persons repeating traditions without understanding and performing ceremonies without inspiration. But when we have made all allowances for the darker side of Christian history we can say this at least: When the religion of the Church has been vital, when we can recognise it as having real connection with the Master whose name it bears, then it has been conscious of having a Gospel, an urgent message which must be delivered to all mankind.

This truth was never clearer than it is to-day. Many well-disposed persons are asking if the Church can survive. They enquire anxiously about the future of religion. They strive to improve its organisation, to popularise its services, to promote the better education of its ministers. All these are excellent and necessary things; but the main requisite is simpler and more profound. Has the Church a Gospel?

Does it really possess good news for the burdened and perplexed? If so, then the fluctuating circumstances of social life and intellectual fashion are of little moment. They will not hinder men from hastening to a living word which comes in intelligible accents. If it has not, then nothing can save it. "Why cumbereth it the ground?" It may linger for a time by the power of inertia and custom, a venerable relic of the past, a sentimental appanage of the conservative party; but not for long and not usefully. Better to shut the churches and no longer allow them to distract us from the business of life.

All this is sufficiently obvious. We must have a Gospel. But what is it? What precisely was the good news that came with our religion, and what is the message which we have to commend to the modern mind?

Let me first indicate what I think the Gospel is not. We must distinguish between the Gospel and the Christian religion. No doubt the Gospel is the core of the Christian religion, but it seems a mistake to treat them as one and the same thing. For properly the Christian religion is that historical movement which, beginning

about nineteen centuries ago, has produced such a rich variety of beliefs and practices and institutions. We should have to include the Papacy and the Quakers, the monastic orders and the Salvation Army, the Copts and the Modernists in our estimate of what Christianity has meant for the world.

There is another distinction which seems to me important. We must not identify the Gospel with Christian institutions. No doubt most people will find it hard to abstract the thought of the essence of their religion from its association with Church and sacraments. We shall find indeed that the Gospel requires both Church and sacraments for its expression, but it is necessary to realise that they are the instruments of the Gospel, not part of it. They are the creations of the message, not the message itself. This principle is confirmed when we observe the unecclesiastical nature of the teaching of Jesus. When we speak of the Gospel we are speaking of something prior to organisation and institution, of something which is the original source of every truly Christian institution. Does not this throw some light on an annoying controversy between two parties

of Christians? We are familiar with the argument that the Church gave us the Bible and is therefore authoritative for its interpretation, and we are also familiar with the opposite view that all authority comes from the Scriptures. I suggest that it is the Gospel which invests both Church and Bible with their authority. Of course it is obvious that the Bible, or a part of it, existed before the Gospel, and that the Christian Church is a continuation of the Jewish Church, but it is as means for communicating the Gospel that both have value for the Christian.

What then is the good news that comes into the world with Jesus? In answering this question we must beware of assuming that the whole Gospel can be found in the Gospels. It may be so, but we must allow for the possibility that, apart from St. Paul and St. John or even the later developments of theology, its full content cannot be understood. Liberal Protestants have too often taken for granted that the Gospels are the text and the Epistles only comment. The truth is that both text and comment are inextricably intermingled—the person

and words of Jesus are mediated through the experience of the first Christian generation. But at any rate we shall agree that the starting point is to be found in the teaching of Jesus. Wherever the complete Gospel is to be found its beginning is in Jesus.

The answer to the question, What was the message of Jesus? can be given in three words: the "Kingdom of God," "The Kingdom of God is at hand," "The Kingdom of God is among you." That is the summary and the guiding thought of Christ's preaching. But obviously we have said very little unless we know what He meant by this phrase, and its full significance can only be gathered from a careful study of the whole record of Jesus' life and words. There are however some salient points which we may consider. Great controversies have arisen around the conception of the Kingdom and mountains of scholarship have been accumulated to elucidate its history and its meaning. The plain man may well wonder how he is to find his way amidst such an array of learning and reach a reasonable conclusion on this vital matter. I will venture, however, to

say that there are some results which are beyond reasonable doubt and that they are sufficient.

First, the word translated "Kingdom" means primarily "rule." The emphasis is not on a domain which is governed but on the active sovereignty of the King. Secondly, it is clear that Jesus thought of the Kingdom as future but also as in some sense present. He thought of it as to come. Like all the Jews who made use of the conception in their religious life, He envisaged the Kingdom as the ideal condition of life which should be realised by the divine intervention when in the future God's purposes for mankind should be accomplished. The so-called "Eschatological" school of New Testament scholars have insisted strongly that Jesus shared the belief of many of His contemporaries that the time before the end would be very short. It is probable that they are right. But they have often been so much preoccupied with this aspect of the Kingdom that they have forgotten another which is even more important. I do not see how any reasonable doubt is possible that Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom had already come. He was not only its fore-

runner but its inaugurator. "The Kingdom of God is among you." In that we may find the originality of the message. Many had said that it would come. Jesus said it had come. But where? It had come in Him. He was the first to exemplify and embody the complete rule of God. In His consciousness the divine purpose was accomplished. We can see therefore that there is no real contradiction between the two aspects of the Kingdom as present and as future. It has come completely in one place—in the heart of Jesus. It can never come more fully than that; but its area may be extended until all the elect children of God shall have been brought into it.

We can find a confirmation of this view if we observe how it explains the facts of His life and His recorded sayings. Why is it, for example, that there is no utterance or action of His which indicates that He is conscious of sin or is subject to the guilt and weakness of evil? It is certainly not because He is insensitive to evil or because He holds a view like that of the Christian Scientists that moral evil is an illusion. On the contrary there is overwhelming evidence that the forces of evil were so real

to Him that He found no difficulty in adopting the current belief in evil spirits. He teaches His disciples to pray constantly that they may be delivered from the evil one and that their debts should be forgiven. But He never utters such a prayer on His own behalf. There can only be one explanation of this which does not make nonsense of the whole history of Christian origins and compels us to attribute the origin of the religion which has most completely identified moral goodness and devotion to a person of singular moral insensibility. It is that in Him the rule of God was really absolute and the Son was never conscious of separation from the Father. Let us guard against a possible misapprehension here which might be made the ground of a plausible objection. We are not committed to the view that the whole gamut of good possible to man is exemplified in the experience of Jesus. It is obvious that the specific excellencies of the man of science or the artist are not to be found in the example of Jesus. Like all human lives, His life was limited in the material presented to it and in the tasks and duties arising therefrom. To say "Follow Jesus" does not serve as a substi-



tute for a system of ethics. What does seem to emerge unquestionably from the study of the facts is that this soul, so sensitive to the distinction between good and evil, was conscious of no imperfection in His reaction to the call of the circumstances of life; or, to be more accurate, was always conscious of communion with God.

Why again does Jesus appear to set Himself in the place of God? He does this when He proclaims new laws for the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, presuming to amend and even to abrogate the laws of the Old Covenant, which to Him no less than to His hearers had divine authority. He does this again when He invites the sorrowful and burdened to come to Him. "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." The thought of the Kingdom and of Jesus' relation to it makes this otherwise enigmatic word natural and intelligible. He can give men rest because He is one with the Father and when they take His yoke upon them they enter the Kingdom.

In order to show the full force of the argument which we have been stating, it would of

course be necessary to bring into account many other considerations. We have not referred to any of the sayings in which Jesus appears to make direct claims to divinity. We have omitted altogether the evidences of the gospel of John. These have been discounted by critics as later interpretations, largely on the ground of what the critics themselves consider to be the probabilities of the case. But it will easily be seen that, if our view of the Kingdom and of Jesus' conception of His own relation to it is correct, many of the sayings in question will appear in a different light. So far from being antecedently improbable they will become just the kind of thing that would be most likely to have been said. Of course if you start with the assumption that Jesus could not have believed that He was the divinely appointed inaugurator of God's Kingdom, you will eliminate all passages which suggest that He did; but you have at least no right to call such a procedure "scientific." We should also have to examine the vast mass of religious and moral experience which goes to show that, to say the least, the claim made by the New Testament and, as I am sure we may add, the claim made

by Jesus for Himself, is not patently contradicted by the subsequent history of the human spirit. But we are engaged on the search for the primitive Gospel and not primarily concerned with the argument for its truth. That primitive Gospel is the filial consciousness of Jesus. In Him there steps out into history the man who, in His own conviction, unites God and man. The divine life is unchecked and unobscured in His soul. He knows God not by the hearing of the ear but by the most uninterrupted communion, and therefore He is able to reveal the nature of God. Through Him, if we accept His claim, we may become sure that the Power behind the Universe is not blind and purposeless or indifferent. The Father of Jesus is the highest and the truest name for God.

But the consciousness of Jesus is a human consciousness. Though one with God He does not cease to be man. For that reason His coming into the world is a Gospel and not a portent. It is as man that He realises in His own spirit the Kingdom of God, and therefore His experience is the basis of a message of good tidings for men. Jesus regards all men as potential children of God. His hope is that

they may share His experience and enter the Kingdom which He has inaugurated.

We may pause here to notice an important point about the attitude which a man may reasonably adopt towards this claim of Jesus. A great deal will depend on the presuppositions with which we approach it. To one who already believes in God it will seem no incredible thing that He should have revealed Himself in a human experience. For we shall believe that God has always been revealing Himself in and through the personalities of men. If, however, we do not believe in God, we shall find little difficulty in producing a plausible explanation of the gospel history which will dismiss the experience of Jesus and His disciples as illusory. I know that many Christian thinkers have used language which seems to contradict this. They have said, We know nothing of God except through Jesus. I confess that I cannot understand this. It seems to argue an unnecessary pessimism about the efforts of the human intellect to understand the universe and a strange disregard of the religious experience of the human race. It would be nearer the truth to say that we can know nothing of Jesus except through

God. At any rate we cannot begin to understand what Jesus was unless we have some insight into the vital meaning of that idea of God which was the foundation of His thinking. It is worth while to get some clear idea of the true order of thought in any reasonable presentation of Christianity. First comes the belief in God. In order to establish this we shall have to make use of the moral and religious experience of mankind, and in this will be included the consciousness of Jesus. From that we may go on to show the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God. When we have done this, we shall undoubtedly find a new and deeper meaning in the idea of God. This is not an academic question. It is of immense practical importance. One who wishes to treat seriously the question, What does Jesus mean for the world and for me? ought surely to start by being clear about the presuppositions with which he approaches the question.

So far we have been dealing with the beginning of the Gospel. But we can see clearly that even in the teaching and the experience of the Master there is development and in fact that His life falls into two phases. The opening

note is one of optimism and success, but before the end the element of tragedy enters and adds a new tone, a more mysterious depth, to the message. It is probable that Jesus expected His Gospel to be accepted by the people. There were encouraging signs that the poor to whom the Gospel was preached heard it gladly. But the adherence of the crowds only made the opposition of the authorities more bitter. Soon it became clear that the Kingdom would not come with power this way. It was then, we may suppose, that He began to see that He must suffer for the Kingdom, and to this period we may assign the mysterious sayings which look towards death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the earth and die it remaineth by itself alone, but if it die it beareth much fruit." "The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many." It seems that the last journey to Jerusalem was made with the intention of challenging the powers of evil to do their worst. Jesus strode before His disciples like one impatient to fulfil a dreadful mission; and they were afraid to speak to Him.

So the Gospel which began with cheerful promise ends in sublime tragedy—it culminates

in a voluntary sacrificial act. The reason why this act was necessary Jesus does not explain except in mysterious phrases; but it cannot be doubted that He believed it was demanded by the purposes of God.

Thus it would be true to say that the Gospel in the Gospels lays the foundation but does not complete the building. There is an integral part of the work of Jesus to be reflected upon and interpreted. Why does the preaching of the Kingdom culminate in the cross? What is the significance of the mystery of Calvary? The Apostolic preaching made this deed and mystery central in the Christian message and in doing so believed that they were carrying on the real spirit and meaning of Jesus. But there are many to-day who hold that those who did this were grievously mistaken. St. Paul and the other Apostles, we are told, did not complete the Gospel; they destroyed it. They turned a beautiful and reasonable idealism into a magical doctrine of salvation. As Mr. Shaw has put it, Christianity was supplanted by "Crosstianity" and Christ was obscured by the cross. Is St. Paul's teaching the fulfilment or the perversion of the message of Jesus? That



is a question which we must consider in our next chapter. We will not anticipate that discussion; but whatever conclusion we may reach on that subject our study of the life and teaching of Jesus has not been fruitless. Even if we were led to believe that the Apostles were hopelessly mistaken and that St. Paul had spoiled the Gospel of Jesus; even if we repudiated all the Epistles and the later interpretations of the Christian Gospel, there would still remain a solid nucleus of belief and inspiration. The germ of the Gospel has been discovered. It is the consciousness of Jesus, a consciousness of unbroken communion with God and therefore a revelation of the Divine nature and will. It is the message of the potential sonship of every human being. It is the assurance that the divine life in humanity consists primarily not in power or wisdom of intellect but in love and purity of heart and the will to serve which encounters suffering, if need be, for the good of the brotherhood. In a true sense Jesus Himself is the whole Gospel and His word, "Follow me," the whole of the Christian religion—the rest is comment.



### CHAPTER III: The Elaboration of the Gospel



## CHAPTER III: The Elaboration of the Gospel

To men of an older generation the question we are discussing would have been almost unmeaning; at least it would have admitted of a plain and obvious answer. What is the Gospel? It is simply the whole teaching of the New Testament. It used to be assumed without question that the New Testament is a single coherent whole, all, so to speak, of one piece, and that its writers were all saying precisely the same thing. No doubt even then it was admitted that the doctrine of the New Testament was not entirely comprehensible by the limited capacity of human beings. There were profound mysteries and passages hard to reconcile with one another; but nevertheless we must take the book as a whole and to suggest that there was any real divergence of thought of one writer from another was to strike at the very idea of revelation.

I hope we shall see that this opinion was not

essentially wrong. There is truth in the belief that the New Testament throughout is saying one thing and that the Gospel can be collected from every part of it. But the old belief in its crude and literal form cannot stand. Criticism has forced us to make clear the individuality of the writers and to appreciate their various standpoints. It has also shown without possibility of doubt that there has been development within the New Testament itself, and even in the thought of St. Paul we can trace the same process. The development of Christian doctrine begins in the earliest literature. Much the same has happened here as in the case of the Old Testament. That too used to be regarded as a single volume equally valuable in all its parts because everywhere the "word of God is written." Now we have learnt, to the great advantage of our religious life, that it is a library, representing all stages of culture and religious insight, a record of spiritual advance, not the infallible word of an oracle. Though less clearly and on a far smaller scale the same conclusion emerges from a candid study of the New Testament. Though it is certainly correct to speak of the religion of the

New Testament, it is certainly incorrect to speak of the theology of the New Testament. There are in fact several theologies in it, two of which stand out as markedly individual and markedly different from one another—that of St. Paul and that of St. John.

Most of the very interesting and important problems which arise from this new understanding can perhaps only be profitably discussed by specialists, but there is one point where every intelligent Christian is concerned to form an opinion. Many sincere investigators think they have discovered a sharp difference and even contradiction between the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the Apostles. As we saw, Mr. Bernard Shaw finds two religions in the New Testament, Christianity and "Crosstianity." Other writers, who have perhaps better claims to be regarded as serious students, have been led to the same view. We have treatises written on the "rival philosophies" of Jesus and Paul. It is in fact quite seriously maintained that the Christian religion as it has existed in history was founded not by Christ but by the Apostle of the Gentiles. We are asked to believe that Jesus was a religious teacher who spoke of the

Heavenly Father and the coming Kingdom of God, laying down the outlines of a lofty spiritual ideal; but that His teaching perished with Him. No one was found to carry on His simple message and His reasonable way of life. Instead there arose one or two powerful but superstitious personalities who transformed the Gospel into a religion of redemption, like many of the contemporary "mystery religions," and made the simple religious peasant of Galilee the central figure in a magical drama of salvation.

Now it would be quite wrong to dismiss all this as pure nonsense. Sincere and able men do not adopt views of this kind without some ground, and there are facts in the New Testament which seem to lend some support to the theory. The controversy about the extent to which language derived from mystery religions occurs in the Epistles is too technical and obscure to enter upon here, but it seems likely that some influence of this kind will have to be admitted by candid critics. Nor is the admission against the probabilities. It would have been strange if St. Paul had moved so long in close contact with communities saturated with these ideas without being consciously or uncon-

sciously affected by them. Nevertheless when the utmost that candour can require has been granted, it remains one of the most certain facts of history that St. Paul's mind and religion were Jewish in grain, founded no less than those of Jesus on the Hebrew prophets. The Gentile cults have influenced at most the periphery of his thought, not the centre.

The main support however for the opinion which we are discussing is found in a fact which can be understood and estimated by any one who will read the Gospels and Epistles. There is a difference between the atmosphere and the attitude of the first three Gospels and those of the rest of the New Testament. Read the gospel of Mark and then the Epistle to the Romans and you will perceive at once that you have passed into a new mental climate. This difference is too subtle to define in set terms, but let us take a particular instance. What is the central idea in the teaching of Jesus? As we have seen, it is the Kingdom of God. But when we turn to the other writings of the New Testament we find that the phrase has almost disappeared. It is not the dominant conception. Instead we find St. John speaking of

eternal life; we find St. Paul basing his message on redemption through Christ's death. What again is the predominant interest for us as we read the Gospels? It is the disclosure of the religion of Jesus, His communion with the Father, His words about the true life. What is the central interest of St. John and St. Paul? Not what Jesus thought of God but what we are to think of Jesus. St. John presents Him to us as the eternal Word of God, St. Paul as the pre-existent Son of God. The centre has shifted. In the Gospels it is Jesus' relation to God. In the Epistles it is the relation of men to Jesus and through Him to the Father. There is some exaggeration in all this, but it is not an unfounded difficulty. There is a real question here. Was Christianity strangled in its cradle and an inferior substitute put in its place? Was the teaching of St. John and St. Paul a grand misunderstanding? Was it an interpretation or a perversion?

The discussion in our previous chapter will have given us the proper standpoint for estimating the value of this opinion. We have no hesitation in admitting that there are abundant signs of a development of belief about Christ



within the New Testament itself; but we are no less certain that the representation of the Apostolic teaching as a spoiling of the simple ethical message of Jesus has no foundation. This picture of a preacher of goodness and of a childlike natural religion finds no warrant in the Gospels themselves. We can see that the germs of all the distinctive beliefs of the Apostolic Church can be found in the life and words of Jesus. The strange metamorphosis of a religious leader into the figurehead of a system alien to his spirit has not in fact taken place. In order to show this we must take the chief points in which it is alleged that the later interpretation falsified the intention of the Master and see if the accusation can be sustained. I suppose that there are two such points of supreme importance. First, it is alleged that the Apostles gave divine honour to one who never claimed it; and, secondly, that they attributed a meaning to the death of Christ which was far from His thoughts.

It is certain that all the Apostolic writers, with the possible exception of St. James, agree in thinking of the life and death of Jesus as the central fact in history, and they do this because

they are convinced that He is the supreme revelation of God. His name is Immanuel, God with us. Has this belief any basis in the words and actions of Jesus? If what we said in the preceding chapter was true it certainly has. We saw that Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, but we saw also that His words and actions disclosed a unique conception of the nature of that Kingdom and of His own relation to it. The Kingdom, which means the rule of God, is coming, but it is also here in the life and consciousness of Jesus who is its inaugurator. All His actions are in harmony with the claim. He legislates for the Kingdom. He speaks for God. We need not concern ourselves here with the discussion whether Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and what the significance of that claim may have been. It is in the present writer's view quite clear that it implied the assertion of supernatural power. We have enough for our purpose in what lies on the surface of the Gospels depending on no research into the history of Jewish thought. We can see that it is a great error to think of the Jesus of the Gospels simply as a teacher like other teachers.

That way we can make no sense of the story. He claimed to have a relation to God and to humanity different from that of all other men. He believed Himself to be beginning a new era of human history, the era when the Kingdom of God was with men. You may say that He was deluded or a madman if you please, but without throwing aside the whole record you cannot eliminate this momentous fact. In Jesus' own view there was no limit to His significance for the world, no limit to His authority over men's consciences. And if this is true the alleged gap between the teaching of Jesus and that of the Apostolic Church vanishes. It is the invention of people who are obsessed by the idea that Jesus must have been like a respectable lecturer of the Ethical Society. If there is any mistake or illusion in the matter, it dates farther back than St. John or St. Paul; it goes back to Jesus Himself. All that they say about Him has its root in what He says about Himself. The Word of God says St. John, the Image of the Father says St. Paul: they are but accepting the claim that the Lord made and interpreting it in forms that came to their hand.

It is certain too, that the Apostolic Church

found a profound meaning and value in the death of Jesus. The modes in which this belief is expressed vary again from one writer to another, but the root idea is the same. Christ died for me, He died for sinners: that is the simplest expression of the common creed. Is this an imagination of St. Paul's grafted onto the tragic story of the crucifixion? Is it a myth adopted from mystery religion? Or has it a basis in the life and words of Jesus Himself?

As we have already seen, the simple common-sense view of the death of Jesus and its causes is refuted by all the evidence. It is one of the services of the "Eschatological" school of criticism to have made this quite plain. It is perhaps natural for us to approach the records with the presupposition that Jesus, like many other prophets, was a martyr to the truth which He taught, that His enemies finally put Him to death, cutting short a life which might have been of great service to the world had it been prolonged; that the tragedy of the death was its premature ending of a noble career. But this is manifestly not the view which Jesus Himself took. He could have escaped without difficulty and without disgrace. Had He kept

away from Jerusalem it is probable that He might have continued His preaching undisturbed. He went to Jerusalem to challenge death. He went because He knew that death was necessary for the completion of His work, to give His life a ransom for many. You may say again, if you like, that He was a deluded fanatic, but the fact remains that this was His conviction. And therefore when St. John speaks of the Lamb of God, when St. Paul writes about the redeeming death and the blood of Christ, they are interpreting not inventing; they are trying to make clear the words and deeds of Jesus Himself.

We may then return to the point from which we started. The old view which found one message throughout the New Testament was not essentially wrong. There is no chasm between Christ and His Apostles. There is development and interpretation but not perversion. The particular manners of interpretation differ and it may be that some have ceased to be useful for us. We may not be able to understand what St. John means by the Word of God, and the arguments and conceptions which St. Paul uses may belong to a world of ideas

which we have left behind. Probably we must find different modes of expression for our own day. But the message is the same throughout the varied library that composes the New Testament. It is not a theology but the record of an experience, the statement of a conviction growing out of life.

Can we now answer our question, What is the Gospel? It is sometimes said that the Gospel is the Incarnation. There is a sense in which that is true, but the statement is misleading. Incarnation is a word adopted to describe the significance of Jesus. It leans to the side of theology rather than religion. The Gospel is not the doctrine of the Incarnation but the fact which the doctrine is intended to interpret. A man may have a very firm belief in the doctrine of the Incarnation and yet never have begun to understand the Gospel of Jesus. On the other hand he may have the most hazy or erroneous notion of the doctrine of the Incarnation and yet possess its truth as a living reality every day. The question is not, Have we understood the Athanasian or any other creed, but what in practical life is the value we give to Christ? If we have found God in Him

we have grasped the truth of which the doctrine is the symbol.

The Gospel then is, first, that God has revealed Himself in human life. The nature of God, of the "Power behind phenomena," of the "Arbiter of Destiny," need not depend on abstract argument or come at the end of difficult speculation. God is not remote, inaccessible, unknown. If we would know what God is like, if we want to know Him not theoretically but for the purpose of living, we may find Him in a perfect human Person and Life. He has drawn near and disclosed Himself, not in clouds and thunder but in a perfect life of love. Secondly, the Gospel is that the life and death and resurrection of the Christ have an eternal significance. They are God's word of love and reconciliation. From them proceeds a power which can lift the soul of man out of fear and impotence into the experience of sonship with God, from terror and weakness to confidence, peace and joy. Thirdly, with Jesus there has entered the world a spirit which can save society and achieve the ideal of brotherhood. He has disclosed the principles which alone can guide mankind to the realisation of its true destiny.

The moral ideal which He teaches and exemplifies is the absolute and final ideal, never to be surpassed or superseded. It claims the adherence of all rational spirits. And, since it is divine, rooted in the Eternal, it must prevail. "He shall put down all rule and all authority" which is opposed to His spirit.

This is the Gospel, and the unchanging message to be commended afresh to the mind of every generation. It is not, of course, the whole Christian faith. There are many other beliefs which Christians have been led to accept as the consequences and buttresses of their central conviction. It is good sometimes for those who have a richer creed to remind themselves of the simplicity of the Gospel which is the core of their religious life. But it is still more necessary for the numberless men of good will who are doubting whether they can call themselves Christians to be persuaded of its simplicity. The very wealth of the Christian tradition may sometimes be an obstacle to its acceptance. Religion, like everything else, tends to become ever more complex. It is allied with social and institutional developments. The Church with its politics and policies obscures as well as pro-



claims the Gospel. It gives rise to all manner of problems on which great minds have pondered but to which no final answer has been found. But the essential Gospel is not in these things. Let us not let slip the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. God is real. His nature is love. He has manifested Himself in human life. He draws near to His children to save, to strengthen and enlighten. If everything else in the teaching of the Church should remain dark to us, we should doubtless miss much inspiration and value, but if we believe this in such a manner that it enters our lives as a principle of action we have the good news of God.



## CHAPTER IV: Is God a Projection?



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WE have seen that belief in God is the foundation of the Christian Gospel. Jesus accepted, apparently without question, the conception of God which had been reached by the Hebrew prophets and adopted by the Jewish Church. There is no evidence that He felt any need for an argument to prove that God was real, and there is no saying of His which admits the possibility of doubt. It is evident that the existence of the Heavenly Father was luminously certain in the experience of Jesus. On the whole, the same statement might be made about the New Testament in general. There is little if any reasoning directed against those who questioned or denied the Divine. The Apostolic propaganda is directed towards a different end. It seeks to correct mistaken conceptions of the Divine and to show that God has revealed Himself in Christ.

We are conscious here of a striking contrast between the time of the Beginning and our

own. We are accustomed to meet people who have consciously adopted a negative attitude towards the Supernatural, and, though to describe oneself as an Atheist is perhaps something which most people would shrink from, the label Agnostic is one which many wear with a modest pride. We naturally tend to suppose that the world has always been divided much in the same way between believers and unbelievers. That is not true. A recent Scandinavian writer has shown that disbelief in the existence of the Divine was a very rare phenomenon in the ancient world. There were indeed some thinkers among Greek philosophers who deserved the name Atheist, or sceptic, in the modern sense, but they were few. Those who had the label affixed to them by contemporaries or tradition were often men who rejected popular conceptions of deity only because they had a higher idea which they wished to substitute for current superstitions. They did not reject God, but only the gods of the prevalent faith. Thus in the eyes of the pagan crowd the Christians of the early centuries were atheists, and one of the most vivid pictures which has come down to us from that time is

that of the aged Polycarp at his martyrdom retorting the accusation "atheist" on the mob. Neither Polycarp nor the mob disbelieved in the divine—they differed in their conceptions of the divine.

If we turn to more recent times we find that the same verdict must be given. Many of those who stood as atheists in the minds of contemporaries were really nothing of the kind, but were simply unable to be content with the versions of the divine nature put forward by religion and theology at that period. The most famous example of this is the great Jewish philosopher Spinoza. "The Atheist" was a common epithet for him, and even the sceptical David Hume goes out of his way to express his disapproval of the "impieties" of the author of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*—with his tongue in his cheek. In fact Spinoza was a man of profound religious spirit, and though his conception of God differed widely from that of Christian orthodoxy, it was so central in his thought and life that later writers have even blamed him for his preoccupation with the idea of God and have called him the "God-intoxicated man."

We may say then that atheism and scepticism about the existence of any divine Being are on the whole a modern phenomenon. It is important to recognise this fact for more reasons than one. We do not sufficiently realise that we are living in a social order which differs fundamentally from any that has existed in the past. All civilisations which have flourished up to the present have been created and sustained by men who had some common supernatural belief. This belief gave a sanction and authority to regulations of conduct, to codes of law and ethical standards. It formed the cement and common bond which held the society together. At the present time the purely secular state is coming to be the only possible one. The social "nexus" cannot now be a common faith or even a common ethical standard; it must be economic interests and the vague but powerful sentiment of patriotism. Who can say whether the experiment of the secular state will succeed? Who again can doubt that it is actually being tried and that its trial is the most momentous event of this century? But the fact that now for the first time a society appears to be emerging having no necessary connection



with religious faith, and that this is a completely new fact, is additional evidence that scepticism and atheism on a wider scale are peculiarly modern phenomena.

Can we see any reason for this? A complete account of the causes of the present situation would require a full consideration of the development of thought both scientific and philosophical since the Renaissance. Into that long and difficult discussion we will not enter here; but there is one cause which is of great present interest and which has received too little attention. It is only in the modern period that we have come to draw a clear distinction between mind and all other objects. Modern thought has adopted the "subjective" standpoint and has never wholly succeeded in throwing off the influence of the saying with which it began its career—*Cogito ergo sum*. Even those who describe themselves as "realists" seem to be under the same influence, for they are compelled to spend most of their energy in showing why they are not "subjectivists." Modern thought is permeated with the presupposition that there is a sharp division between mind and the objects of mind, that my experi-

ence is the one certain fact for me. As we have seen, though hints of the subjective standpoint can be found in ancient thought and in Augustine, on the whole this is a peculiar characteristic of the modern mind. In this way the opportunity has been given for a clear statement of the atheist creed. It is a simple one. No one can, of course, deny that God exists in a certain sense. He certainly exists as an idea, as an image or a construction of the mind, in the thought and imagination of religious people. To the believer the explanation of the existence of this idea is, in the last resort, that there is a real object corresponding to it. The atheist asserts, on the other hand, that there is no reality outside the consciousness of religious people which answers to their idea. If you could abolish all the people who believe in God you would abolish all the reality which God possesses.

It is clear that, though the atheist creed is not difficult to state, it requires some defence. Religion has its explanation of the rise and persistence of the conception of God, and the philosophers who have made use of the "Ontological argument" have agreed with religion in

finding that the idea of God is ground for belief in His real existence. The atheist must give some plausible account which will not involve any reference to reality. He must show how the illusion arose. Recently a useful word has come into fashion to describe this view. It is said God is a "projection." The first inventor of this phrase was, I think, the German, von Hartmann. The idea of God, he held, was a projection of the needs and hopes of the human race on to the blank wall of the unknowable. God is created by man's necessities and longings. He is humanity looking at itself in a glass.

What is often called the New Psychology has seemed at least to reinforce this theory and make it more definite by showing how this process of projection works and by analysing the psychological situation out of which it arises. As is well known, one of the most important tenets of the modern study of the mind is the influence of conflict in mental life. In all persons this element of conflict is present in some degree, because the instinctive impulses which work in us unconsciously tend to lead to actions and desires which the conscious moral

judgment disapproves. Conflict may reach a pitch where it produces desperate mental disorder forbidding the mind to function as a unity at all. The state of conflict, whether acute or not, is a state of discomfort, and the mind is constantly seeking for unity and harmony. It adopts various devices for alleviating this strife which is its bane. Every one is familiar with the word "repression." It represents the most common method of dealing with conflict. The memories and thoughts and desires which are unwelcome to the conscious directing intelligence are relegated to the unconscious, where they work unseen, never appearing in their true form in the conscious life but never ceasing to influence the course of that life.

But there is another way of escape from the realisation of conflict—the way of idealisation. Instead of pretending that the self is what we desire it to be (making a "fantasy") and thus covering over conflict with illusion, we may project our ideal into the outer world. We may find our harmony in the supposed character of some other person. We imagine him to be what we should like to be, and we offer him the hero worship which is really the wor-

ship of one side of our own self. But idealisation can go further than this. We may project an ideal, not on some actual man or woman, but on an imaginary person. There, at least, it will be safe. The imaginary ideal person, the God whom we have ourselves created, can never shatter our dreams by actions contrary to our conception of him. We can rest in the thought of God who fulfils all our desires.

The suggestions of the New Psychology do not stop there. Some have argued that, just as the conflicts of our individual souls are symbolised in dreams, so the unconscious conflict in the soul of the race is symbolised in religious myths. The stories of the gods—all of them—including the Christian Gospel of redemption—are, so to speak, the dreaming, the symbolic dreaming of humanity.

The details of the theory vary greatly from one writer to another, and there are many elaborations such as that of the "father complex," which, though important, must be omitted here. The general outcome is clear enough. Religion may be necessary, an inevitable result of the structure and nature of mind; it may even be, as not a few of these authorities confess, a

source of health and power and consolation; but it is not true. There is no real object except the figment of human fantasy: there is no Lord to be "my light and salvation and the strength of my life."

What shall we say in answer to this formidable onslaught? Perhaps it is still necessary to deplore the habit of some religious people to show their panic by their ignorant denunciation. There are too many people who seem to think that the best way to silence opponents and critics of religion is to shout as loudly as they can. Not long ago I had sent to me a paper in which it was asserted that all who accepted the scientific theory of evolution were among the goats spoken of in our Lord's parable of the Sheep and Goats. My reading of that parable is different. The goats, I think, are those who fail to exercise the divine virtue of charity, not those who hold honest opinions which they have reached by patient research and the employment of God-given reason. So we will not rail against or sneer at the New Psychology; but we will have faith to believe that what is true in it, like all truth, will, in the long run, further and not hinder true re-

ligion. We will strive to point out where some exponents of the new knowledge seem to have been mistaken in their conclusions.

It is obvious that a full answer to the view which we have been considering would consist in a complete statement of the whole argument for Theism. That would involve a comparison of the Theistic philosophy with rival systems, and a long discussion of the nature of religious experience together with a statement of the positive arguments, particularly that based upon the conscience, for the belief in God.\* Even an outline of those converging lines of thought is here out of the question, and we must confine ourselves to the particular aspect of the problem which we are dealing with: nevertheless it is most important constantly to remind ourselves that behind this special controversy lie two discordant views of the nature of the universe.

The first point we have to make is this:—Religion has no interest whatever in denying that the idea of God is a projection. Confusion of thought here is widespread but inex-

\* Perhaps I may be allowed to refer the reader to my book, "Studies in Christian Philosophy," Macmillan, for a philosophical defence of Ethical Theism.

cusable. A great many people, even some learned professors of psychology, seem to think that if they can show how the idea of God arises in the mind whether of the individual or of the race, they have gone a long way to show that it is a false idea. A moment's reflection will convince us that this is absurd. No one supposes that when one's thoughts are directed towards religious objects then alone they are beyond the investigation of science. We may readily agree that there are laws of mind and that they can be discovered; we may agree too that mind obeys these laws when it is thinking about God just as much as when it is thinking about the next meal. There is, therefore, nothing surprising in the fact that a more or less coherent account can be given of the development of the conception of God. The real question at issue is not, Is the idea of God a projection, but is it *only* a projection? If the phrase may be allowed, Does the projection *hit* anything?

We may justly feel some surprise that the curiosity of our psychological investigators often stops short, abruptly, at the very point where the most important question seems to arise.



They are intensely interested in the beginnings of mind. They tell us a great deal about the instincts and the very unpleasant tendencies which we carry about with us beneath the surface of our conscious life; they have a great deal to say about the origin of conflict and its importance. But they do not ask why the soul is thus restless and torn by opposing tendencies. There is a great question here: Why does the mind form the ideals which cause the conflict? This duality which is the root of conflict is surely very strange, but not so strange as that men should think they can give a satisfactory view of human life while failing to recognise it. The universe has, we may agree, produced in its onward movement the instincts which link man with the lower animals; but it has also produced the ideals of truth and goodness which seem to raise him to God. Why should we say that the one has a real object and the other not? Why should we hold that the instincts of sex and hunger are adapted to man's real environment and affirm at the same time that the thirst for harmony and righteousness has no such real object? There is obviously no reason at all.

The same universe which has awakened man's hunger for bodily satisfaction has awakened his hunger for the Bread of Heaven. It satisfies the one, and it can satisfy the other.

There is, moreover, a curious contradiction in the practical result of the theory we are discussing, at least as presented by some adherents. We are told that religion is an inevitable outcome of the nature of our minds, that the idea of God is one that is necessarily formed and that the action of religious motives may often be salutary in helping the self towards a higher unity. But the actual consequence of this theory would plainly be to destroy the value of religion, since it would be absurd to suppose that religion could have any power when its object was recognised as being an illusion and God nothing more than a projection of our minds. There have been many thinkers who have based their whole philosophy on the conviction that what the mind necessarily thinks is true. On this view we should be led to the conclusion that what the mind necessarily thinks is false. As Lord Balfour once said, this may be a very unsatisfactory world, but it is, we may hope, not quite so unsatisfactory as that.

The fault of most sceptics about religion at the present time is that they are not sceptical enough. They direct their critical faculties against the doctrines of religion, but it will generally be found that their criticisms are based upon assumptions which are at least as precarious as any made by religion. The first step towards an understanding of religion is to become aware of the profound mystery which surrounds our life on every side. These general remarks are applicable to our special problem. When once we have started on the hypothesis of projection we ought to be careful that we do not overlook its wide implications. God is not the only idea which may be treated in this way. There is another which has equally good claims to be considered as having a similar status—the idea of Nature. We all believe that we live in an orderly system of events in which everything is connected with everything else in a rational and intelligible manner. That assumption, sometimes inaccurately called the “Uniformity of Nature,” is the basis of common life and no less of the whole of science, including psychology. How do we get this idea? It is certain that no one has ever examined all the

events of the whole range of time and shown that they fit into this scheme, and it is certain that no one ever can. Moreover, if any one ever could perform this impossible task it would be useless, because in all his researches he would be taking for granted the very principle which he was professing to prove. The order of nature is, in fact, an ideal which our minds have projected, it is the "objectification" of the desire for harmony, for the release from conflict, which is, as the new psychology has shown, at the very source of our being. But we believe, nevertheless, that it is true. Nature is really like that. And why do we believe it? Is it not in the end because the idea has "worked"? It has helped man to survive, it has enabled him to control circumstances and to win some measure of security and power.

The same claim may be made for the idea of God. It is the projection of our conceptions of value, just as the order of nature is a projection of our ideal of unity and harmony. And we have the same kind of reason for believing in the reality of God as we have for believing in the reality of nature. The idea works. Over long periods it has helped man to survive, it has

given him courage and hope, it has inspired him to transform not only his environment but himself.

Perhaps we ought to notice an objection which unreflecting people might be inclined to make. It may be said that the cases are not analogous because the idea of God has changed so greatly, whereas the idea of nature has remained the same. Only a very careless person could say this. Consider the difference between the order of nature as conceived by Aristotle and as conceived by modern science; or compare the "nature" accepted by common sense with "nature" as it appears to the modern physicist; there is as much variation in the conception of nature as there is in the conception of God. The same process has occurred in both cases; by experience and thought men have advanced in the knowledge of nature and of God.

The reader is probably wearied by this argumentative chapter, but I shall make no apology to him. He must be a queer person if he is not willing to endure the pain of a little thought in order to gain a better right to believe in God. Let us sum up. We have been engaged, not in

proving the existence of God, but in laying a ghost. When the ghost is laid we may fall back with confidence on the well-known lines of argument which confirm the affirmation of the religious consciousness but which we have purposely not included in our present discussion. Above all when we cry unto the Eternal and believe that to our spirit an answer comes we need not torture ourselves with the suspicion that the answer is only the echo of our own voice. For we have seen reasons to believe that, though the idea of God is a projection, it is not a mere projection: The idea of God meets the fact of God.

Two brief comments may be permitted, in conclusion. It seems likely that, in the long run, the new psychology will have one result which may be welcomed by all religious men as confirming a conviction which grows out of their experience. It is demonstrating that religion is native to the human soul, not a sophistication of the intellect. Religion's beliefs, we have been taught by Tylor, Sir James Frazer and others to think, are to be explained as more or less crude attempts to account for natural phenomena; the psychologists are taking us

behind the intellect and showing that religion emerges naturally out of the instinctive life which is the basis of our being.

We have seen that they are right who tell us that the idea of God is a projection, though they are wrong who add that it is *only* a projection. But if this is true it will follow that the idea of God which we project will depend on what we really are and will be limited by the level of our aspirations. The kind of God I genuinely and in action believe in is an index of the kind of person I genuinely am. Who can doubt that there are many people who take the name of God to cover a multitude of ugly desires? They say with the lips that God is holy love, but their real deity is only too plainly the projection and personification of their own passions and vindictive tendencies. Psychology confirms the sayings of the Lord. Knowledge of God is the heritage of the conscience. "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."





## CHAPTER V: Is God a Person?



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IF we can remember our childish experiences and compare them with those which come to us in these days of adult life, we shall be struck by the vast difference between God as we thought of Him then and God as we think of Him now. In that early time God was perhaps very much a part of our life. He entered into it in much the same way as other important persons such as father and mother and, later, schoolmaster. Though invisible and more mysterious, like them He was pleased or angry. In fact He was a person just as they were, and, in our imagination at least, He had "body, parts and passions." The growth of our experience and knowledge has changed our outlook so that it is only by an effort that we can transport ourselves back into the old frame of mind. It may be that our sense of the profound mystery of things has deepened and that the apprehension of the Divine Power behind the world of appearances has not faded; but something has

gone, that simple commerce between person and Person is not easy now. We feel that to enter again the Kingdom of Heaven we must indeed become as little children, but that to do so is impossible unless we can cast aside all that science and life itself have taught us of the world.

Something like this has happened to the mind of the human race. Though the appreciation of the extent and complexity of the Universe has deepened and purified the conception of God from many crude associations, it has weakened the belief that God is of such a nature that I may hold personal intercourse with Him. The idea of God has played an important part in the development of modern thought in the West. Modern philosophy really begins with Bacon and Descartes and shows from the outset the influence of the flood of new scientific knowledge which enlarged the universe as known by man in every direction. The conception of God which the philosophers took over from the Theologians performed a very necessary function in the great systems of thought which were elaborated by the remarkable thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries. God is for them the principle of unity, which gives coherence to the whole scheme of things. Without the conception of God the constructive philosophies fall to pieces. Thus Descartes himself employed the idea of God not only to help him to get beyond his primary *datum*, "I think, therefore I exist," to some further certain knowledge, but also to hold together the two orders of existence, the two kinds of "substance," thought and extension, matter and mind, which otherwise would have stood over against one another in irreconcilable duality. In the system of Leibnitz, utterly different in spirit from that of Descartes, we find the idea of God filling the same place in the system. It has been alleged by Mr. Bertrand Russell and others that God is quite unnecessary in Leibnitz's philosophy, which would have been much better without Him. This is a mistake. Without the conception of God the system of Leibnitz would be no system at all, and he would have been compelled to give an account of the universe as a collection of "monads" without any uniting principle. These two illustrations will perhaps make clear that the tendency was to

think of God as primarily the principle of unity. Though neither Descartes nor Leibnitz intended to deny that God was the righteous and loving personal Ruler of the universe, yet in their thought He assumed the position of a philosophical concept. This tendency came to a complete expression in Spinoza who identifies God with universal substance and explicitly denies that He could be personal or could in any sense be thought of as loving His creatures.

The subsequent history of thought has, on the whole, shown the same character. Thinkers who have arrived at the conception of some ultimate Reality have identified that Reality with the God of religion, and have frequently used the terms "God" and the "Absolute" as if they were identical. There is a sense in which almost every one may be said to believe in God. The very attempt to think philosophically means that we are trying to think about existence as a whole and seems to imply that there must be some principle of unity in it. Only those thinkers who give up the central problem of philosophy as insoluble can be said to reject belief in God altogether. But it is very evident that a man may believe in an

Absolute, a principle of unity, or an ultimate Reality, without having any belief in the God of ordinary religious experience.

There are a great many more philosophers in the world than we usually suppose. A vast number of people at the present time are grappling in a vague way with the problems upon which the master minds of the last four centuries have meditated from every point of view. Unfortunately, owing to the system of education in English-speaking countries, such people are too often wasting their time by wandering up blind alleys in ignorance that these have already been fully explored. Is it too much to hope that before long the main outlines of modern speculation will be an ordinary subject in the higher classes of our schools? Many of these intelligent and thoughtful men and women have been impressed by the scientific view of the world, and have come, more or less definitely, to the conclusion that God, if He exists at all, must be conceived after the manner of Spinoza, as an impersonal principle.

It would not be true to say that religion stands or falls with belief in a personal God. History would furnish conclusive refutation of

any such assertion. Buddha can hardly be said to have had any belief in a personal deity, and Spinoza himself is a witness that a complete rejection of personality in the Divine can go along with a profound religious experience. It is clear that a noble type of mysticism may flourish best with a theology which has ejected purpose, will, love and all personal qualities from its thought of God. But it is equally certain that the Christian religion does stand or fall with the possibility of thinking of God as personal. The God of the New Testament is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word which describes the relation of the Christian to God is "communion," which implies a personal intercourse. The Gospel depends upon the truth of the statement "God so loved the world" and upon the conviction that God can be loved by us.

There is, however, a very important distinction to be drawn. When we say "God is personal," we do not necessarily mean that "God is a person." Though some Christian thinkers would accept both these statements, the second is not necessary for the Christian faith. Indeed it is doubtful whether an orthodox Christian



could hold that God is a person, for the doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is a unity of three Persons. We must remember, however, that the word "person" in the definitions of that doctrine does not mean precisely what we mean in modern speech. The essential tenet of Christian faith is that God may be thought of in personal terms, that when we do so we are using the forms of thought which most adequately express His nature.

If the plain man were asked to say in a word what was his chief difficulty about a personal God he would probably search about for the word "anthropomorphism"; or if he did not know the word he would express its meaning in his own way. To think of God as personal, he would say, seems to be conceiving God in our own image. We are persons and, therefore, we naturally think of the Divine in terms of our own experience. This may have been very well in days when the universe was less adequately understood, when even such intellects as Plato and Aristotle could hold that the celestial bodies were divine as compared with our sublunary sphere. But now we have been educated out of such puerile views and cannot be-

lieve that the Power, or Principle, which manifests itself through all the boundless expanses of space is in any way like unto ourselves.

We must admit that our plain man's difficulty has some ground. If we revert once more to our own experience, we can easily see that when we were children we were thoroughgoing anthropomorphists and that our increase in wisdom, if so it may be called, has consisted partly in rising to less anthropomorphic conceptions. In the same way it is easy to see that much of the advance in man's thought of God has occurred through the effort to purge it of degrading human associations. Anthropomorphism of the cruder kind is not unknown even to-day in Christian preaching, and we have all suffered under the ministrations of people who seemed to conceive the Almighty as a greatly enlarged Anglican clergyman or Presbyterian Moderator. We will allow the plain man or any one else to say what he likes against such teaching. But he must beware of condemning anthropomorphism altogether. If, in reaction from the offensive crudities which we have referred to, he denies the use of human experience, we must respectfully point out

that he is telling us not to think at all. It is certain that we cannot think except with material presented in our consciousness, and it is to be feared that we are incurably human; at least no one has ever shown us a method by which we could acquire modes of thought not conditioned and coloured by our human experience. Every conception we use is derived from anthropomorphic sources; whether we like it or not it has the image and superscription of humanity upon it.

Must we not then distinguish? The ancient Greek thinker, Protagoras, laid down the maxim, "Man is the measure of all things." What Protagoras meant is uncertain, but it is clear that there are two possible interpretations of the *dictum*, the one leading us to false anthropomorphism, the other to the true. We may take it to mean that each individual is to attempt to understand the universe in the light of his own individuality; his own particular desires and prejudices are to be his clue to the meaning of reality and value. It is obvious enough that along that line we should arrive at nothing but absurdity. There would be as many "true" conceptions as there were

persons, or, what is the same thing, there would be no truth at all. But we may interpret Protagoras as intending to imply that man in general is the measure of all things, that we must attempt to understand life and reality by means of those principles of reason and estimations of value which appear to be inherent in our human nature. And if that be the meaning it is plainly true. We must work with human concepts or not at all; if man in this sense is not the measure of all things, things cannot be measured at all by man.

The logical reader is no doubt thinking that it is high time we came to grips with our subject by propounding a definition of personality. I hope he will forgive me if I steadfastly refuse to do anything of the kind. It is in fact one of the main contentions which I want to make that personality is essentially indefinable. It belongs to that class of things which we can recognise but not define, and when we satisfy ourselves with a definition of it we are laying ourselves open to the most dangerous illusions. Nevertheless, we can say several important things about personality. For instance, to be a person is one way of being alive, and when

we say God is personal, we are asserting our belief in a living God. It may seem that any God in whom any one would think it worth while to believe must be a living God, but this is far from being true. In fact the misunderstanding between religion on the one hand and philosophy and theology on the other has arisen precisely at this point. The religious man believes in a God who is alive, creative, doing something now, whereas philosophy and theology have often presented him with a God who can only be said to will or act or create in a highly metaphorical sense.

One of the most interesting features of recent thought is the way in which our leading thinkers have come to agree with the plain man that the universe is really alive, and that any principles of explanation which we put forward must be derived from life. The "block universe" against which William James bore testimony has fallen out of fashion, and the two most important schools of philosophy at the present time, Bergson and his followers, and the Italian Idealists, Croce and Gentile, take their stand in Biology and History, respectively.

We must not assume, however, that this

movement leads directly to belief in a personal God. This is certainly not the case with Bergson, who would find the inner reality of the world in an impersonal life-force. It is possible to believe that God is alive without believing in his Personality. Possible, but surely not very plausible; for this life-force seems to be nothing but the conceptions of life in general. How do we arrive at it? It is by the observation of concrete living beings; it is an abstraction from them. Life means the manner of existing of living beings; it has no meaning apart from them. If, therefore, we want to avoid talking in fruitless abstractions, we must say that the inner reality of all existence, the moving spirit of the world, is concretely alive, alive after the manner of some of the living beings with which we are acquainted.

This brings us to another point about personality. To be a person is not only a way of being alive, it is the highest way. Living beings arrange themselves naturally in an order of value; "person" is the name we give to those who come at the top of the scale. In what does this superiority consist? Chiefly, in two characteristics: First, the living beings whom

we call persons exercise self-conscious reason, they are capable of forming general ideas and consequently of much larger prevision in action. Secondly, they have the capacity of guiding themselves, to some extent, by the apprehension of values; they form ideals and can pursue them over long stretches of time. A person differs from a being who is below the level of personality in that he is not guided solely by the automatic action of instinctive desires, but is in some degree self-guided, directed from within by the system of value-judgments which he has built up.

Thus we reach a further piece of information about personality—it is the richest and most definite type of living unity. The activity of every living being has a unity, since it all proceeds from one centre and is determined by the nature of the being; but in a person the impulses which are frequently discordant are gathered up into a whole by the dominant conception of value which the person has adopted. We can see very well, moreover, that this unity is not always complete, in fact, that in our experience it is never complete. There are elements in the nature of all human persons which

have not been brought into harmony with the leading idea of value, impulses and desires which have not been incorporated into the "organised self." We are, therefore, led to conclude that personality as we see it in human beings is, at the best, imperfect, an ideal only partially achieved. It is true then, that we cannot attribute to God personality of precisely the same kind as our own. But this is not because God is not personal but because we are not completely personal. In God that to which we only approximate is fully realised.

Prof. W. R. Sorley, in his important book, "Moral Values and the Idea of God," has used a phrase which is a useful summary of one aspect of personality. Persons, he says, are the "bearers of value." By that he means that all values, moral or æsthetic, goodness or beauty, depend upon reference to some personal experience. A little reflection will show that this is true. We could scarcely say that even a landscape was beautiful unless there were some person capable of appreciating it. Apart from that we could only say that it would be able to give rise to the value of beauty if there were any mind of sufficient development to



perceive it. The case is still clearer when we think of moral values. There is no sense in talking of goodness in the ethical meaning unless we are thinking of persons. We are only speaking fancifully when we call a rock brave or a bed merciful. Values then exist for persons and are realised only in personal life.

This is an immensely important truth. There are two possible attitudes towards our judgments of moral value. We may say that they have no importance in forming an opinion of the kind of universe in which we live; we may think that they are nothing more than temporary conveniences which enable human beings to live together, that they are biologically and socially useful and no more. If we had space we could show that this attitude is quite illogical; but it is perhaps unnecessary, since nearly every one who has any developed moral life at all in practice gives more authority to moral judgments than this. I confess that I do not think it is possible to persuade a man to believe in a personal God if he will not allow the moral consciousness to be a most important part of the evidence. We must leave him to make what he can of his mutilated universe. We

take our stand, therefore, on the second attitude towards moral value, which is that of all great ethical personalities. We cannot believe that the moral ideals of humanity are negligible for philosophical thought; on the contrary, we trust our experience that when we are acting righteously we are co-operating with the purpose of the universe. In other words, we believe that moral values have their basis in the nature of Reality; they are grounded in the central core of Being.

Now if we accept this, it is clear that we shall be led naturally and almost inevitably to think of God as personal. We have seen that personality is the only "bearer of values." If the values of goodness and beauty are integral to existence, the Cause and Ground of existence must be the Bearer of Values—He must be personal.

Perhaps we might leave the question there, but a few words may seem to be required about a difficulty which has been raised by philosophers. It is said that personality requires the distinction between a self and a "not-self"; there is always something "other" than the person from which the person distinguishes

himself. How can there be an "other" for God, it is asked. We must admit that the statement with which the objection begins is well founded. It is true that, in our experience, we always find self and not-self correlated and we cannot conceive a personality in which this distinction did not exist in some form. But the difficulty seems serious only for a Unitarian. We should be hard put to it to find an answer if we were contending that the Godhead is a single person. But that is not our thesis, nor has it been the thesis of orthodox Christians. As we stated at the outset, the essential belief for the Christian religion is not that God is a person but that He is personal.

We said at the conclusion of the last chapter that we had been trying to lay a ghost. In this chapter we have perhaps done something to lay another spectre which haunts the religious life of educated men. We are tempted to distrust our experience of personal communion with God and by distrusting it to lose it. We reproach ourselves with anthropomorphism and hide God under abstract terms. Let us not be deceived by the illusion of size. The modern view of the physical universe has deepened in-

calculably the impression of the majesty and the mystery of God; but it has done nothing to modify our belief in the manner of His existence. God's thoughts are infinitely longer than we knew. But it is God who thinks them. Whatever the new revelation of the extent of His creation we may still approach Him as the Bearer of Value and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI: The Trinity in Human  
Experience



## CHAPTER VI: The Trinity in Human Experience

IT is to be feared that most people, even among sincere Christians, do not find the phrase "the doctrine of the Trinity" a very inspiring one. They accept it as perhaps a necessary consequence of what they believe about Christ and the revelation in the New Testament, but it seems to them to be a baffling mystery with no direct bearing on life. It is indeed true that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was developed primarily in order to preserve what seemed to be the teaching of the New Testament; but, though the doctrine was not elaborated under the impulse of distinctly philosophical motives, we saw some reason in the last chapter to think that it had very considerable value in connection with the belief that God is personal. We cannot perhaps be surprised if the ordinary man is not greatly drawn to the doctrine of the Trinity when we remember what theologians have often made of

it. They have not always shrunk from alleging that a mistake about the metaphysics of the relation of the Divine Persons to one another might involve the mistaker in the loss of his salvation. They have treated the doctrine as if it were a complete scientific account of the Divine nature, and while professing that it is a mystery have made out of it a source of intellectual puzzles, a ground for the exercise of dialectic. It is not the purpose of the present chapter to add anything to this debate. Its aim is more modest, to suggest very briefly a point of view from which it can be seen that what the doctrine of the Trinity is trying to express is implicit in all religious experience.

There is a passage in the Fifty-fifth Psalm which runs as follows in our English Bible, "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, morning, and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice." This translation does not bring before us one interesting feature of the passage. Perhaps we might render it better thus: "As for me, I am calling upon Elohim; and Jahveh is answering me. Evening, morning, and at noon, I am complaining and moaning; and he has



already heard my voice." The curious point about the passage which our translation brings out is that the poet uses two different names for God in the same breath. "I am calling unto Elohim; and Jahveh is answering me." It is an interesting question of scholarship whether the bringing together of the two names is accidental or intentional. There are some grounds for thinking that it was not inadvertent, because the Old Testament writers usually employ one name or the other consistently.

The answer to this question of scholarship does not greatly matter, since in any case we can use the passage as an illustration of the point we are trying to make. Let us proceed then on the assumption that the author really meant to use different names for God close together. We should then have to assume that he meant to bring together two slightly different ideas. For the two names denote two different aspects or conceptions of the Divine Being. The distinction is not easy to express with complete accuracy. The name Elohim is probably connected with the oldest word for God in the Semitic group of languages, and has perhaps as its root-meaning simply power.

Elohim, as used in the Old Testament, emphasises the power aspect of the Divine nature. Elohim is the Almighty, the Unapproachable, the Transcendent Being who dwells above all that is. Perhaps the best English word to convey the meaning is that of which Matthew Arnold was so fond—the Eternal.

The other name, Jahveh, has a different implication. It is the personal name of the God of Israel. It denotes God in His relation with His chosen people. Jahveh makes His Covenant with them. He speaks to them through the prophets. He deals with them in the fortunes of history, punishing them and loving them. It is the Angel of Jahveh who manifests the Divine to human sight. Jahveh is the God of the Covenant, the God of history, the personal God who dwells with men. We may remark in passing that the older theologians were accustomed to dwell upon the connection between Jahveh and Jesus and to find in the theophanies of the Old Testament predictions of the Incarnation. There was a profound truth in this thought, for the line of religious reflection associated with the name Jahveh was really completed in the belief in the Divine

Son, when God who dwells with man became God in man, God with us.

It will add to the value of our illustration if we consider the situation of the writer. We know nothing of him except what we can gather from his poem; but that is sufficient. He is in deep distress. His hopes and aspirations have all failed, and the cause with which he identified himself has been crushed. Godless oppressors rule the holy city and disillusionment and despair oppress him. "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." It is out of this despair that the cry to Elohim rises. He lifts up his hands to the Eternal. Is there no purpose in the world? Is there no meaning in life? But it is from Jahveh that the answer comes—"Jahveh is answering me." The divine response and reassurance comes from the Covenant-God, out of the midst of human life and history, through the personalities of other human beings.

I have lingered over this particular expression of a religious experience not because it is in any way extraordinary but because it is typical.

The very simplicity of the circumstances and of the reaction of the poet to them enables us to seize the salient features of the religious consciousness. If we knew more of the author perhaps we should learn less from him. I suggest that we have here the bare bones of the typical religious situation.

The author of this poem called unto Elohim when he was distressed by the failure of his hopes. It has been a gibe of unbelievers that men find God because they cannot get satisfaction out of this life. They turn to the unseen world when this world gets beyond their control, hoping that there may be some power that will rescue them from their perplexities. The gibe is not well founded, but the assertion is true. When we turn to the dim beginnings of religion in the human race we must walk warily in a ground which is conjectured rather than known. Under the guidance of anthropology, however, we can form some picture of man's earliest state. We see him a weak and bewildered animal, having gained little from his superior brain-power but the capacity to suffer terrors to which the animals lower in the scale are not subject. The beginning of the

faculty of "looking before and after" must have meant enlarging the dominion of fear. The primitive man found himself surrounded by dangers which he could not provide against, and by forces which he could not control. Hobbes was not wrong when he described his life as "poor, nasty, brutish and short," but out of this condition that religion in its rudimentary form emerges. Man, conscious of his desperate condition, lifts up his hands to the mysterious powers by which he is enveloped.

Not less is this true of the origin of vital religious experience in the individual. The passage from religion of the derivative kind to that of first-hand originality is always through disillusionment. Not that the way invariably lies through outer disaster as with our Psalmist, though it is true of very many, "before I was troubled I went wrong"; but the perception of the hollowness of the aims and ambitions which have formerly filled the life seems to be a necessary moment in the religious consciousness. We might illustrate this at great length from the personal history of men and women the evolution of whose spiritual life has been recorded. It will be sufficient to mention three

very different types. We think of Buddha filled with a sense of the emptiness of life, leaving his palace and his wife and child that he might find salvation; we remember Augustine and his description in the "Confessions" of the way in which he was led to God through the growing perception that the things of this world could not satisfy him. We could not call John Stuart Mill a man of strong religious faith, yet in the latter period of his career he was certainly a man of religious spirit. In his "Autobiography" he has left the record of a period when he felt oppressed by a poignant sense of the futility of the ends which he was pursuing and a conviction that the attainment of every one of them would not bring satisfaction. Man always calls to God "out of the deep." The problem of evil may furnish a theoretical difficulty for belief in God and offer a standing problem for Theism, but the fact of evil, at least in the sense of imperfection, is the starting point of religion. A shallow optimism is the most inimical of all tempers to the life of the spirit.

Our Psalmist called to Elohim. Here too we may find a type of all religious experiences.

The appeal of the soul is to the ultimate Ground of existence, the aim of religion is to rise above illusion. In this "moment" of the religious consciousness we see its close kinship with philosophy, which is indeed, as I believe, not really distinguishable from religion. The earliest beliefs of savages are both religion and philosophy, since they are attempts to explain the world and to find in the explanation some basis of life. Both philosophy and religion have as their motive force the desire to pierce behind the appearances to Reality. The former in modern times has confined itself almost exclusively to theoretical release from illusion, the latter has sought always not only to know the truth but to be made free by it, to find a Reality on which life may be securely based. It follows, therefore, that nothing but ultimate Reality can finally satisfy this religious impulse. The thirst out of which it arises cannot be slaked except by that which is final; no mere representations or symbols can be completely satisfying. This fact is the justification and the explanation of the constant self-criticism and controversy within religion itself. If religion ceases to criticise the conception of

God it dies. It must be constantly stripping off the veils of mythology that it may draw nearer to the ultimate Truth and Reality.

The third "moment" in religious experience is the response of the Divine to the cry of the human soul. Men have certainly believed that when they called unto Elohim an answer came; but it was Jahveh who answered. The revelation and the assurance came through human life and history, mediated through human personalities. All genuine religion is revealed religion; that is to say, we can trace it back to some alleged disclosure of the divine.

In the lower forms of religion we can distinguish two modes of supposed supernatural communication. We have the kind of prediction of the future which is derived from the observation of omens and the examination of the entrails of a sacrificed victim. This kind of pretended revelation is not religious in the strict sense at all but belongs rather to the sphere of magic, since it does not necessarily involve any belief in gods or spirits. The religious type of revelation, even in the lower stages of development, depends upon persons who are supposed



to be inspired. The prophet as we find him in the Old Testament is the descendant of a long line of "inspired" persons whose inspiration may seem to us to be very dubious. He stands in the direct line of succession to those individuals who in an ecstatic condition, sometimes induced by intoxication or wild dancing, were believed to be under the control of supernatural power and the medium of divine communication. The point here is not the value of these crude beliefs and practices but the fact that from the beginning the revelation of the divine has been found in human life, human experience, human personality. Thus the Christian Gospel is in line with a conviction which runs through the entire history of religion. It is the culmination of the belief that God is revealed in human personality, it is the carrying over of an idea, which began in ignorant superstition, into the sphere of spiritual truth and moral values. For it is a profound mistake to think that the Christian Revelation is a body of infallible truths about God or a supernaturally guaranteed system of doctrine. The Christian faith is not that God disclosed interesting philo-

sophical propositions about Himself, but that He revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

There is no need to dwell on the fact that knowledge and assurance of God comes mediated through human personality. It is a truth which is obvious to us all. We have called to Elohim, to the mysterious Power which is at the root of our lives. We have tried to pierce the darkness and discover the reason and purpose of the whole. We have had little success. At best, while we think in isolation from our fellows, we may form a clear conjecture and a hope. If assurance of God has come to us it has been through the voice of other human beings; when we have seen love in action we have been able to believe in the love that is divine.

The analysis of religious experience which we have now given is, no doubt, imperfect; but it includes, I think, the main outlines of the truth. Thus it is that men have felt and striven and achieved in the religious life. We may, of course, dismiss the whole thing as based on illusion and the cause of deplorable waste of time and energy. It may be that this reaching

out of the human spirit towards the unseen has been a pathetic search for a Friend who is not there. But if we are not prepared to disregard the central thread of the experience of the race, we shall find that it will harmonise with the Christian conception of God.

“I called unto Elohim.” Why did I call, and why do men everywhere call? Why is it that the human animal alone cannot be contented with his earthly home and seems infected with this strange “nostalgia of the Eternal”? The religious explanation of this fact is surely one which has at least the merit of really explaining. It is that man seeks the Eternal because in fact he belongs there. He is not simply a finite individual, but, as the late Mr. Bosanquet taught us to say, a finite-infinite individual; or in the simple words of religion there is a divine spirit in man which will not let him rest in anything lower than the highest. As we have seen, the life of religion depends upon the conviction that there is an ultimate source or ground of existence with whom it is possible for the human soul to get into contact, to know Who is deliverance and power: and further we have seen that the assurance of the reality of

this source and of His character comes always through human life. Thus we may see, so to speak, the Trinity in action—not a dogma enshrined in a creed but a fact manifested in life. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not philosophical abstractions; they can be discerned in every complete religious experience.

## CHAPTER VII: The Word Became Flesh



## CHAPTER VII: The Word Became Flesh

IF the reader has followed with sympathy the line of thought which has been sketched in the previous chapters, he will find himself occupying a point of view from which the Incarnation will appear not unreasonable but on the contrary agreeable to the nature of the universe. But it is often said that this element in the Gospel is peculiarly repugnant to the modern mind and that here, in its central tenet, the Christian message is outmoded. We may, therefore, profitably devote a little space to the consideration of this assertion. We shall find, I think, that it may be argued on the other side that in many respects the belief that God is in man is easier for this generation to accept than for most of its precursors.

We must begin by drawing an important distinction. Religion and theology are not the same thing, though they are closely connected and are therefore easily confused. It is to be feared that some people who suppose them-

selves to be religious are really only interested in theology. Though religion always makes for itself, sooner or later, a theology, the theology is a later product, a secondary result; it is the attempt to explain religious insight and experience in the terms of intellectual conceptions, and necessarily in the terms of intellectual conceptions which are current at the time. That there is this difference between religion and theology is surely obvious. We all know men and women who have a beautiful and vital Christian experience and communion with God who could not talk for five minutes on theology without involving themselves in heresy and absurdity. And perhaps we know, too, men and women who have gone pretty deeply into the theology of the Incarnation without having, it seems, caught one gleam from the Light of the World. Religion needs theology to serve as its preservative against corruption and to help to propagate it from one generation to another; but theology may also cramp and hinder religious growth. This happens when reverence concentrates upon the formulas which the theology of one age has adopted and refuses to change them though they have become inade-



quate or even unmeaning. A formula may be a more pernicious idol than an image.

We are concerned in this chapter with the religious value of the Incarnation and not with the traditional theology. We do not now discuss whether there can be an improvement on the time-honoured formulation. It may be that the confusion of philosophy is so great at the present day that it is wiser to hold fast to the old manner of statement, even though it employs forms of thought which are not lucid to modern intelligence. To me, if I may express dogmatically a personal opinion, it seems clear that modes of thought have changed so greatly that a new way of stating the old religious truth is needed, and that, whatever may be done by corporate bodies of Christians, individuals should be encouraged to think out the theology of the Incarnation afresh. We may venture to think that some at least of the great men who thought out the statement of the doctrine in the early centuries of Christianity would have been the first to wish that the Gospel could be stated in language intelligible and persuasive to the mind of the age.

What then is the religious value, the prac-

tical spiritual truth, which the doctrine of the Incarnation has meant to convey and conserve? In other words, what does it mean in practice, in terms of action, to me and to all men? Put into the simplest form it is something like this: —The divine nature, the character of God, has been adequately manifested in a human life and person. If we want to know how to think of God we must look at Christ. And this revelation of God is primarily a revelation for the purposes of life. It is intended for all men, not solely and not chiefly for the philosopher and thinker but for the wayfaring man. Clearly the whole divine being cannot be manifested in a human life. Jesus certainly does not display the attributes of omnipotence or omniscience. He shows us the Father as we are concerned to know Him, as we may imitate Him and share His life. “Be ye, therefore, perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect,”—not infinite but perfect in love.

The view which we take of the relation of God to the world is certainly very different from that held by the Christians of the first four centuries. The dominant idea in the ancient world was that of an absolute chasm

between the divine and the human. It is true that popular Hellenistic religion believes in very human deities and that its mythology seems to us to merge human and divine in a shocking manner. But it was not Greek religion which influenced the doctrine of the Incarnation, it was Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy, as Mr. Paul Elmer More has recently insisted in his series of volumes on the Greek tradition, is dualistic through and through. It may be admitted that the dualism is concealed though not abolished in Stoicism and the system of Plotinus, but in Platonism, which furnished the main part of the intellectual background for theology, the dualism is patent. Plato held that the ideal forms of classes of things existed timelessly, forming a system which culminated in the Idea of the Good. These forms, the "patterns in the heavens," were indeed "reflected" in the sphere of time and space but very imperfectly, and he never succeeded in explaining how the two spheres of being could come into contact with one another. There was some reason then for the complaint of his pupil Aristotle that Plato had made a chasm between two kinds of being.

Aristotle himself, though he abolished the world of separate forms and reached the conception of form immanent in things, did not in the end bridge this gulf between the divine and the human. It may even be said that he accentuated it, for his God is as aloof from the world as it is possible to be. He is the First Cause and Final End of all things, but rapt in self-contemplation, pure Thought thinking itself unconcerned with this sublunary sphere and indeed unconscious of its existence.

The other great stream of tradition which flowed into Christian theology, though very different in its nature, tended to produce the same general result. The Jewish conception of God was, on the whole, that of a purely transcendent being. Though, as we have seen, there were elements in Jewish religion which pointed in the direction of divine immanence, the main effect of the prophetic teaching was to leave imprinted upon the Jewish mind a conception of God as separate from the world. He is the "High and Holy One that inhabiteth Eternity." Men are before his eyes like grasshoppers.

Thus the mind of the ancient world was permeated with the presupposition that a great

gulf is fixed between God and man; divine and human are distinct kinds of being. What a scandal then to the intellect to be told that God has appeared in man, that this impassable gulf has been bridged, that God is in Christ. That this had taken place was a chief part of the Christian message; how it could be was a standing puzzle. The complex and subtle discussions which weary us when we read the history of doctrine in the first five centuries, were the result of the attempt to grapple with this problem. Given the Divine and human as two distinct things, how could they come together in Christ so as to compose one person? The Bishop of Manchester has said that the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. mark the "bankruptcy of Greek theology." He means that the elaborate doctrine of the two natures in Christ was not a solution but the statement of a problem. Several attempted solutions were ruled out, but the question, How can the Divine nature be truly manifested in a human personality? was not answered.

There was indeed a conception both in philosophy and theology which would have given the discussion a more hopeful turn had it been

more fully employed. The idea of the Divine Logos had appeared in the New Testament in the Prologue to St. John's gospel and opened the way to a conception of God's relation to the world which was not purely transcendent. There is some controversy at the present time concerning the source from which the author of the Fourth Gospel derived this conception. Is its ancestry to be found in the Greek idea that a divine Reason is immanent in the world or in the Jewish idea of the Word of God as the agent in creation? It seems probable that both these strains of reflection are combined in St. John's presentation. It is, at any rate, interesting to compare his teaching with that of Philo, a Greek Jew who was writing about the same time. In Philo the Logos appears as the connecting link between the transcendent God and the creation. The Logos is neither completely divine nor completely a creature—he is an intermediary. St. John deepens immensely this conception. For him the Logos is not an indeterminate being vacillating between two worlds. He is not only “with God,” the “Logos was God.” At the same time the self-identification of the Logos with humanity is plainly

stated. "The Logos became flesh." But this "becoming flesh" was not, so to speak, the first appearance of the Logos in the world; on the contrary, "He lighteth every man" and, though they rejected Him, it was "His own" to whom He came.

This stone, so largely rejected by the builders of the doctrine of the Person of Christ, is destined, we may predict, to be the foundation of any modern reconstruction. The idea of continuity, which we saw was so characteristic of the modern mind, has transformed our outlook upon reality. It is not natural for us to think in these sharp antitheses.

Though we do not abandon the belief that God is transcendent, any idea of the divine which we can hold must be also one of thoroughgoing immanence. We are very sure that no fragment of existence, no corner of the universe, can be bereft of His presence or deprived of His life. Though God is not exhausted in the world, He is manifested in it all. We need not repeat here what we said in the chapter on Divine Personality. It is sufficient to remind ourselves of two points which were then discussed. First: Existence does not keep al-

ways to the same level of value. The divine life, we may be certain, is more fully expressed in the higher than in the lower. How can we question that in human personality at its highest, unified and ennobled by the "eternal values," we have the completest manifestation possible under the conditions of earthly life of the Divine? Secondly: We remember that we have seen reason to believe that personality can be asserted of God not simply in a metaphorical sense but in the precise meaning of the words, that God's mode of existing is the personal mode. It would follow, therefore, that a projection of the divine nature into time and space would take the form of personality. If, then, there could be, if there had been a personality and life experience which had left behind the trammels of the lower stages of being, which was one wholly given to the highest purposes, which was, in short, completely personal, there would be God in man, God with us.

We must, however, frankly admit that there is one difficulty which appears to be specially serious for the modern mind. Would not this very postulate of continuity lead us to suppose that there will be a later and fuller revelation



of God? In a world which is in process of evolution, can there be any absolute finality? Must we not after all look for another? Let us notice that the Gospel does not encourage us to keep our eyes fixed on the past. We are to expect a coming of Christ in power. But it most certainly affirms that Christ can never be surpassed. There is no higher revelation of God.

The notion that what comes later in time is necessarily higher in value is a mere superstition which any one can refute from his own experience. It is, moreover, certain that when we are dealing with values we assume that something of the nature of an absolute can appear in the course of evolution. The work of art or of poetry is, in a sense, the product of evolution; but it will not, if it is great art or great poetry, be superseded by later works. It may be that Mr. Bernard Shaw shows us an advance in dramatic technique beyond Shakespeare, but no one would propose to shut up the works of Shakespeare on the ground that we can find all that they have to give us in the plays of Mr. Shaw. The achievement of the artist and the poet has an element of timeless-

ness though it appears in the course of time. In the same way, the very existence of philosophy seems to rest upon the assumption that absolute truth can appear in this developing world. The philosopher professes to tell us in outline what the true nature of Reality is. When he puts forward his view it is with the tacit assumption that he is presenting us with truth which is independent of the time when it is apprehended and expounded. Unless he is doing this he is giving us not philosophy but extracts from his autobiography. In philosophy then also we assume that there may emerge in the course of the process of evolution that which has a value transcending time. There is, therefore, nothing unreasonable in the belief that the absolute revelation of God has taken place in history, that the final insight has been achieved, and that the words of life have been spoken once for all.

When we have dismissed this figment of evolutionary superstition and have understood that finality in time has nothing to do with finality in value we have opened the way to an unprejudiced estimate of the claims of Jesus.

Of the absoluteness of His moral insight, we shall have something to say in our concluding chapter. It must be sufficient here to remark that for centuries the critical intellect has been concentrated on this Figure. From the time of Celsus, who wrote the first coherent attack on Christianity, to the present day men have sought to discover flaws and imperfections in that Life and those words—with a curious result. The faults which they think they find contradict one another. Celsus complains that Christ attracts the outcast and ignorant, that He has no noble pride. The critics in India at the present time lament that He is not meek enough; they do not like His fiery denunciations and “indignation against successful vice.” Friedrich Nietzsche, however, finds precisely the opposite defect. He cannot away with Christ’s loving spirit and humbleness of heart. He would like more sternness and joy of conflict in the ideal. We may leave the critics to answer each other since they cancel out. The person of Jesus stands out all the more clearly as the embodiment of the highest ideal. There have been others who claimed to be one with

God, but there is no one whose claim can bear such scrutiny and at the end appear not a blasphemy but a truth.

There can be no question that the appearance of this Person was the turning point of human history. Jesus has been the supremely creative personality. His influence has made over again the character of innumerable men and women in every generation, but it has done more, it has been the vital principle of a new type of civilisation. The creative impulse is not exhausted. The Christ ideal has not been realised, it has not yet even been perfectly understood. Times change and tasks vary, the mind of man moves forward, but there is no sign that we are passing into a phase where the Christ ideal has lost its value or power. As of old He still walks before us, inspiring even those who do not call themselves by His name.

## CHAPTER VIII: Born Again



## CHAPTER VIII: Born Again

EVERY great spiritual religion, with the possible exception of Confucianism, has come into the world with a promise of salvation for the individual, as a preaching of redemption. It is true that the nature of the deliverance offered is not exactly the same in all the higher religions, though this difference is easily exaggerated. In some, as appears to be the case with the religious life of India as a whole, the emphasis is mainly on the freedom from illusion by the revelation of the true meaning of life and of the relation of the self to Reality. In others, as in the "Mystery religions," the leading note is escape from the fear of death by the gift of immortality, so that one who has passed through the initiations could cause confidently to be written on his tomb, "*Renatus in æternum.*" The popularity of the Stoic philosophy in the Roman Empire was chiefly due, as has often been remarked, to the fact that it had a certain evangelical fervour and offered to its adherents new power of self-control and new

courage to face the uncertainties and sorrows of life. Christianity is not less but rather more than any other a religion of redemption. It has appeared among men always with the cry, "Ye must be born again," and its salvation has always been concerned with deliverance from sin and its consequences, from the condition of moral impotence. It is certain then that the vitality of religion has depended on its answer to a need that has been widely spread among men, the need for redemption, and any modern presentation of the Gospel must not obscure this element in religion. We may ask, in this chapter, whether modern knowledge has thrown any fresh light on the feeling of need and on the satisfaction of that need which so many individuals have in some degree experienced in religion.

To the scientific mind of the Nineteenth Century the promise of the Gospel that we may be born again appeared as an absurdity and stumbling-block. In that period it was generally assumed that scientific conclusions required us to conceive the universe as a vast machine which ground out its inevitable results. The philosophers who claimed to be peculiarly the



interpreters of science thought out a scheme of things in which determinism reigned supreme and all the higher types of existence were products of irrational processes. In such a universe, it is clear, there could be nothing really new. There might, indeed, be changes in the mental sphere which to us appeared surprising and unexpected, but that was due to our ignorance. Could we know enough we should discover that every change in the self was caused by events in the material world. To the message "Ye must be born again," the enlightened persons of the Nineteenth Century returned the sceptical answer of Nicodemus, "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Can he reverse or annul the inherited dispositions with which he came into the world? Can he suspend the operation of the forces of his environment which have been moulding him from his birth? The only way in which I could become a new person would be quite literally by being, as Mr. Weller, Senior, said, "born again and born different," with a fresh heredity and into other circumstances.

As we have already seen, the intellectual po-

sition has changed and the purely mechanistic theory has lost ground steadily among serious thinkers. We can, at least, say that we live in a mental climate which is much more favourable to the belief that new birth is possible. I am inclined to think, however, that some apologists for religion are too ready to assume that the battle for freedom has been finally won. The late Dr. Hastings Rashdall showed his fine intellectual honesty nowhere, I think, more clearly than in his treatment of this question, for though the assertion of freedom would have harmonised well with his theistic philosophy he refused to incorporate this doctrine as an integral part of his system, recognising that the case for determinism had not been completely demolished. But the reader need not fear that he is being led into the unending controversy between freedom and necessity. The last word has not been said in that debate—perhaps there is no last word. At least, it is certain that we shall all go on acting as if we were free.

We may leave this ancient controversy behind us with the assurance that there is no “scientific” view of the world which has the

right to bid us reject the offer of new birth from the outset as impossible, and we may go on to notice the fresh insight which one of the sciences—psychology—has given us. In the light of the new psychology we can see that the effort towards a transformation of the self is not something strange and unusual; on the contrary, it is the normal activity of mind at every stage. The life of the individual spirit can, in fact, be represented as a continuous struggle through conflict towards unity, from the weakness of division to the power of inner harmony.

We have already had occasion to notice the profound influence of conflict in the mental life. The discovery and analysis of this conflict as carried through by Freud, Rivers, Jung and many others has been one of the most important achievements of the present generation. We must now pursue the subject of conflict a little further. It would be a great mistake to imagine that conflict appears only in the case of those persons who are abnormal; it is a fact in the life of the most healthy mind, only in the “normal” person it has not produced effects which noticeably interfere with the efficiency

of the self in its ordinary relations. The instinctive desires, which work in the unconscious, push forward with ceaseless energy towards the objects which would satisfy them. But these satisfactions cannot be granted to the full without outrage to the moral standards which the conscious mind has accepted. Thus the normal or "natural" man is at war within himself. The "law in his members," as St. Paul says, is at issue with the "law of his mind." As we might put it, the instinctive impulses of our animal nature are contrary to the ideals of conduct which we have partly learned from society and partly formed for ourselves. This inevitable conflict may take the terrible and devastating form of mental disorders; but we do not need to resort to pathology to be instructed in it. We can observe it in ourselves. And we can see, too, that this state of division is a source of weakness and inferiority. The self cannot move forward with freedom and power because of this inner conflict. Its energies are not concentrated. "Wretched man that I am," cries St. Paul, "who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Who shall deliver *us* from the grip of untamed instincts?

The way of healthy development is through conflict to unity; and the way to unity is by means of transformation. The psychologists have sufficiently shown that no release can be obtained by the attempt to repress the impulses which cause us trouble. It is no use to ignore them or to cut off the instinctive basis of our being. The folly of extreme asceticism, which endeavours to mutilate the self by abolishing the lower nature, has been made clear by recent researches. If it were successful it would deprive the self of its motive power. In fact it cannot succeed, and its effect is to give the "lower nature" a dangerous subterranean life of its own. The whole man must be saved. The "lower nature" can only be "abolished" by becoming an element in the higher. The way of deliverance from conflict lies in uniting the urge of the instincts with the purposes of the higher self, transferring their energy to objects which are in harmony with the moral values, "sublimating" them so that they are harnessed in the service of the ideals of the mind.

The same phenomenon can be observed when we shift our enquiry from the lower to the higher ranges of our mental life. There, too,

we may see how normal is a state of conflict and how necessary is the achievement of some unity. It is natural to us to think of ourselves as single individuals, always identically the same. No doubt this is, in a sense, true. There is one centre of experience concerned throughout; and my thoughts, feelings, desires, are mine and no one else's. But though in the most fundamental sense we are single individuals, in a very important practical sense we may be said to be several different selves. The fact of what is called "dissociated personality" has been carefully studied, specially in America, and the existence of cases of what are apparently two or more different personalities connected with the same body is generally recognised. Pathological states are usually exaggerations of tendencies which are present in normal minds, and it may be said of all of us in various degrees that we are several different persons, though these persons are not "dissociated" because they are linked together by memory. Dr. J. A. Hadfield, in his able work, "Psychology and Morals," has employed the word "constellation" to indicate the situation. Our desires, emotional tendencies and ideas do

not lie about, so to speak, in our minds as isolated units. They form parts of systems harmonised by a dominant motive as by a central sun.

When we have grasped this fact we are immediately conscious that in us the same "constellation" is not always uppermost. We live in several "universes" of desire and emotion. We alternate between them. Think, for example, of what is implied in the common observation that few men are exactly the same persons in their home and in their business, and in the common saying, "I was not myself when I did that." It is abundantly clear that these "constellations" are always to some extent in rivalry with one another and not infrequently in acute conflict. Equally obvious is it that the personality distracted by conflicting "constellations," torn between discordant "universes," must be weak and miserable. There is no constant direction. It pulls down in one phase what it has built in another. It needs transformation. And this new birth can come only by the end of the conflict through the suppression of one or more of the unharmonious systems. The suppression, however, does not mean

the annihilation of the elements which composed the system; they must be taken up into the higher system, so that, though the system as such disappears, the factors within it live on in a wider harmony. Once again we are brought back to the formula "through conflict to integration, unity by transformation."

Readers of Dr. Hadfield's book, to which we have already referred, will not need to be reminded that the unification of the self and its motives does not usually take place once for all. The factors of conflict and the need for new harmony are involved in the passing of a person through the different stages of a complete life. As we move onward through the years our ambitions and aims should change with us. The hopes and interests of childhood cannot fill our lives all the time, and the man of middle age should have put away childish things. At every stage of life we need a new integration and must build up our personalities round ideals that are appropriate to that stage. There will be conflict here. The interests of the period of life which is completed do not always easily relax their hold upon us. We do not leave childhood and youth behind without



a struggle, and the old man will not resign the full activity of middle life without a pang. But the sanity of our lives depends on our taking a new centre for our hopes and energies—on our being born again.

One very obvious reflection will have already occurred to the reader. The self may seek to escape from its inner conflict in two ways. The struggle is almost always between a higher and a lower, and an illusory rest may be sought in the lower. In the strife between instinct and conscious ideals a man may choose the instinctive life and, refusing the claim of the rational self, think to solve his problem by approximating more and more to the animal, or where the clash is between rival systems of conscious desire the less worthy, the more narrowly selfish, may gain the victory, and the self achieve a kind of unity by quenching aspiration. It is necessary not only to be "born again" but "from above." The advance of the self is not only by way of unification but by unification round ever more worthy objects.

Even more important to notice is the place of ideals in the process which we have been describing. The "constellations" of desire form

a system round a central motive, and the most compact and stable systems have at their centre the idea of an object. Thus the sentiment of patriotism has as its nucleus the idea of the native land.

We can see now why the preaching of redemption has always answered a need of the human soul. The response which is made to gospels of this kind is not due primarily to beliefs which may be current about hell. Man's need of redemption lies deeper than his opinions on eschatology. He may express his sense of need in many different ways, but at the root it is the consciousness of his own inner division and the weakness and inferiority which flow from that. There are good Christians who fear that the message of salvation must lose its appeal when men can no longer be frightened by the terrors of a material hell. They need not be anxious. The city of destruction is within, and the craving for deliverance is based in the profoundest depths of his psychical being. We can see, too, why all the higher religions have, in some measure, really conferred the benefit which they offered. They have provided the ideal centre round which the

unity of self could be established. That the Christian Gospel has done this more effectively and more fruitfully than any other is to be attributed partly to two causes, first, that the ideal itself is more positive and more comprehensive, and, secondly, that it is embodied concretely in a historical person, not an abstract concept but an actual life.

The sayings of Jesus on the subject of the new life harmonise in a remarkable way with the psychological analysis which we have just made. He dwells upon the necessity of a single dominant aim: "if thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." He clearly intends to put Himself forward as the central ideal in the overwhelming demands which He makes for absolute devotion from His disciples, and the removal of distracting ambitions. We may see the explanation here of some sayings which startle us with their sternness: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," and the reply to the disciple who had asked permission to bury his father, "Let the dead bury their dead." It is as if Jesus saw that the transition to the new and highest unity required a break with the interests which be-

longed to the previous stage. The noble word "conversion" has been degraded by base uses. The so-called converted man is too often nothing more than a person with violent prejudices and a strong conviction of his own saintliness; or what is described as the experience of conversion may be simply a stirring of unreasoning emotion easily explicable by crowd psychology and mass suggestion. Conversion, as the New Testament understands it and as Christians ought to understand it, is neither of these things. It is the placing of the Christ ideal at the centre of the life, the unification of the self round Him.

There are many aspects of the doctrine of salvation with which we have not dealt in this chapter. We have said nothing of the doctrine of the atonement. This is not because the topic is not important. It is certainly the essence of the Gospel that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." But theories of atonement have little to do with salvation. Men are not saved by doctrines of the atonement but by Christ, and when one reflects on the nature of some of the views which have been held on this subject one is almost inclined

to add that men have sometimes been saved in spite of their doctrine of the Atonement. At any rate it is true that the explanations given of the efficacy of Christ's work have varied from age to age, but the experience of salvation through Christ has persisted through them all. The preaching of the Gospel is the presentation of Christ to the soul as the highest ideal, the one centre round which the self may securely build its life. This preaching of the Gospel can never be overthrown. Doctrines may be shaken or modified or doubled, but the ideal of life which Christ presents will remain the highest and the most satisfying.

We have seen, I think, that the old evangelical preaching with its burden, "Ye must be born again," was speaking to a profound and elementary need of the human spirit. The freedom and power which came to those who, in the time-honoured phrase, "accepted Christ" was no illusion, and in the light of modern knowledge we can see in part the reasons. As Dr. Hadfield, to whom we have already referred, has said, "The need of psychological rebirth, almost forgotten by the churches, is being re-discovered by psychology."



## CHAPTER IX: Love Never Fails





## CHAPTER IX: Love Never Fails

WRITERS on Christianity often assume that the supremacy of the Christian ideal of life may be taken for granted as accepted by nearly every one. Whatever may be the current doubts about doctrine, there is, it is thought, agreement in principle about ethics. A careful observer of his fellow men would probably feel less confident about this. The doubts about the adequacy of the Christ ideal are generally unspoken. There are few who would range themselves openly with Nietzsche in an attempt to return to paganism or who would complain with Herbert Spencer of the pernicious effects of an unattainable ideal; but the doubts, though unspoken, are there. Let us look at the cause.

In this brief discussion of a great subject we must pass over minor difficulties and concentrate upon the really fundamental question. There are some, no doubt, who are troubled by the reflection that the teaching of Jesus and

of the New Testament as a whole is coloured by the special conditions of the place and period in which it was delivered, and in particular they wonder how far that teaching was affected by mistaken beliefs about the nearness of the end of the present world. But these causes of hesitation, though important, are not vitally important. Every sensible man is aware of the necessity of disengaging a principle from the particular circumstance in which it is expressed. The operation may be sometimes difficult, but there is nothing inherently irrational in it. It is, in fact, one of the marks of a rational being to be able to grasp amid the details of particular circumstances that which goes beyond them and is of universal application.

The really serious difficulty may be put quite simply. Is not the Christian ideal too narrow? Does it not carry in its very body the marks of its birth among a little section of people interested exclusively in religion, permeated by a "supernatural" conception of life, and utterly indifferent to many of the chief concerns of humanity? And in consequence is not Jesus' idea of the good life quite inadequate for our modern world, since some of our most impor-

tant "values" find no recognition in His words or in His life?

We must look at this difficulty a little more closely. The higher minds of our time are concerned with the pursuit of three great ends, truth, beauty and social progress. We could scarcely regard an ideal of life as adequate which did not place a high value on each of these ends. It can, however, be argued that none of these finds a definite place in Jesus' teaching on the good life. The artist who devotes his life to the appreciation and expression of beauty is certainly serving the life of the Spirit, but there are no words of the Lord to encourage or guide him in his quest. The man of science has obviously a vocation of arduous service to an ideal end. Jesus has nothing to say about science or philosophy; there is no indication that he thought of them as even possible pursuits. We are often told that some particular political or social theory is founded on the Christian ethic. It may be so, but it is depressing to find how many and how contradictory are the schemes which claim this august sanction; and the unprejudiced reader of the Gospels will rather be astonished

at Jesus' apparent indifference to the social and political fortunes of mankind.

This is a serious objection, and we must admit the general truth of the statements on which it rests. There are perhaps a few remarks to be made about the extreme representation which we have just made. It is hardly true that the author of the parables had no sympathy with art, or that one who died for the true conception of God had no interest in truth. But these reservations do not alter the fact that some of our most ideal interests have little or no explicit recognition in the words of Christ. To meet this difficulty we must go deeper. We will observe in the first place that Jesus was a historical person, born into definite conditions. One of the results of being a historical person is that you have a definite and limited material given to you out of which to shape your life, and definite and limited tasks arise out of the material. This is true of Jesus. Though, as we have seen, we believe that He had the final insight into the meaning of life, it was not possible for Him, standing at a point in history, to legislate in detail for all succeeding ages. Like us He had to deal with the

material which His environment offered, and fulfil the work which was given Him to do. We can see, therefore, that all those, Christians and agnostics, who demand that Jesus should give us explicit guidance on all the problems which may occur in any period of the world have not understood the meaning of "Incarnation."

But this is not our main answer to the objection. That chief answer we may state as follows: There is a temper of mind, a type of character, an attitude of the human spirit, which is prior to any ideal activity and without which every pursuit of value of any kind will wither and prove unfruitful. It is this temper of mind which Jesus taught and exemplified. We cannot sum up in any phrase what can only be learnt in its completeness from constant intercourse with the Person whose spirit it was, but if we must use a phrase it will be agreed that Jesus thought of the good life as one actuated in every particular by love to God and love to men. This, in His view, was the essence of Goodness, and one who had this spirit would be good in all circumstances and in every kind of task.

If we turn now to our three great types of value we shall find that Jesus has, after all, something of transcendent importance to say to the artist, the man of science and the social reformer. It may appear absurd to say that the true artist must love God, but in fact it is almost a truism. Doubtless there have been many great artists and poets who have not believed in God, but there has been none who has not loved Him. The artist's love of God is manifested in his consecration to the ideal end, to beauty and its expression, which is an aspect of the Divine. We need not labour the point that this consecration to the ideal end is a necessary element in the character of the true artist. Directly he ceases to express his vision and begins to think of what the public wants, of his bank balance, or his circulation more than of his mission, he begins to decline from the position of creator to that of the tradesman. Love of man is no less a part of the character of the true artist. We need not accept the foolish opinion that art and poetry ought to be of some "use" beyond being beautiful, or agree with Tolstoy that they should always be "democratic," but it is true that the noblest

achievements in both these fields have been the work of men who have been in sympathy with their fellows. The art which makes its appeal to a coterie and despises the mass of common people has never been the greatest. We may perhaps think of a satirist such as Swift and wonder whether hatred has not inspired some wonderful literature. But that would be a shallow view. Only love creates, and the bitterness of Swift is the enraged cry of a disappointed lover.

The application of the essential principle of Christian ethics to the man of science is obvious enough. To love truth is not easy, yet it is the condition of all fruitful work. Even we who stand outside the circle within which science is cultivated as a life work have heard something of the temptations that spoil work and hinder progress. Let the man of science cease to love truth more than patents, more than triumph over a rival researcher, more than reputation, and he has fallen below the high calling wherewith he was called. But the second element in the Christian spirit, love of man, seems to be specially needed by scientific men at the present time. Francis Bacon, the

prophet of the scientific movement, appears to have foreseen the danger that knowledge of nature might be used not for the "betterment of man's estate" but for his injury. At any rate in his unfinished sketch of a Utopia, the New Atlantis, he makes careful provision against the employment of knowledge for the advantages of a section of the community contrary to the interests of the whole body of citizens. Can we say that the danger does not exist now? We hear of investigations being pushed forward for the perfecting of poison gas and other means of destruction. It would be absurd to lay the whole responsibility upon the scientific workers. The chief weight must rest upon the society which sets them their task. But have they no responsibility? Can we admit that men who are the means through which inconceivable new power is being placed in the hands of humanity have the right to be indifferent whether that power is used for creation or destruction? Scarcely any thoughtful person would be prepared to answer, "Yes." It may be confidently asserted that one of the most pressing needs of the world to-day is the development among men of science of a cor-



porate conscience which shall include not only devotion to truth but also love of the brethren.

We must now proceed to consider another difficulty, which again is often unspoken but none the less genuine. Among people who would not in words question the supremacy of love as a principle for life, there is an uncomfortable feeling that it will not really work as an ethical ideal. It is instructive to compare the attitudes we almost instinctively adopt towards love and justice respectively. In any company of decent men you might say that you were trying to guide your actions in accordance with justice without giving rise to any internal comment in your hearers except perhaps surprise that you should feel it necessary to make such an obvious remark. Should we feel in the same way about a man who said that he had taken love for his constant inspiration? It is most likely that, if we knew nothing about him, we should suspect him of being either a hypocrite or a sentimentalist. The truth is that Christian love has frequently been preached in such a way as to give rise to the accusation that it is too vague to serve the purpose of life. By some it has been explained as if it meant the

power to feel a vivid personal affection towards all men analogous to that which we have towards our nearest friends; and it has been justly remarked that this state of mind is not only impossible but even contrary to the requirements of the moral consciousness, since, pushed to its extreme, it would remove all those preferences and intimacies on which so much that is noble in human life depends. Others again have reduced the great word love to the level of an abstract moral maxim equivalent to the duty of benevolence or of taking an interest in the welfare of the human race—surely very far from the intention of the saying, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

The New Testament has suffered because it has rarely been interpreted by poets. Jesus' mind was of exalted imagination, and as we may learn from His method of teaching, He had the highest view of the place of imagination in the spiritual life. Love as He understood it was primarily a quality of the imagination. Paul Elmer More, in his admirable book, “The Christ of the New Testament,” has given us what is probably the best description of love. He says it is “that outreaching

power of the imagination by which we grasp and make real to ourselves the being of others."

This is not a complete definition of love, but it has the merit of drawing attention to the distinctive element in the Christian conception. And when we approach the problem of the adequacy of love with this clue in our minds it assumes an entirely new aspect.

To live in love is to live in contact with reality. The loveless person is truly living in an illusory world. He admits, as a theoretical proposition, that other persons exist, he treats them as realities in so far as their actions, present or future, may affect his own fortunes; but he does not begin to realise them as they are in themselves, with their own hopes and fears and experiences. The self-centred life is an illusory life because it is based upon a conception of the world which is not true. When Christ puts love at the root of the good life He is calling on us to be realists, to act upon the fact that the Universe does not turn upon our little centre, but comprises other persons with a being for themselves and a value not less than our own.

It is surely needless to insist upon the truth

of this and its necessity as the first step towards a life in harmony with the nature of things. Though the Christian doctrine of love leads us to heights where the mind confronts the ultimate mysteries of existence, it begins with the plainest common sense and requires us simply to see the world of ordinary life as it really is. We may turn now to touch briefly on that profound aspect of the Gospel of love. Love, it is clear, for Jesus and for the New Testament as a whole is more than the first principle of ethics. It is the clue to the meaning of the universe. God is love. Charity never faileth. By this last assertion the Apostle does not mean that love is never frustrated or that it cannot suffer defeat and disappointment. Still less does he mean that there will always be enough love in the world. He intends to convey something much more sensible and important. Love is the one principle which can never be superseded. However far you get in knowledge or virtue or any other spiritual attainment you will never find that you have got beyond love. Love is always the key to Reality.

It is here that we may find the difference between the Christian way of life and all others

which may be fairly compared with it. The others say love is good, love is necessary: Christianity alone says love is supreme—charity never faileth. To prove this statement would require an exhaustive survey of the teaching of the spiritual leaders of mankind. Perhaps in default of this it may be sufficient to illustrate it with reference to three great names.

Among all the children of men who might be compared with Jesus none will occur to us more readily than Buddha. There are remarkable resemblances between the way of Buddha and the way of Christ. The Buddhist who follows his master will be gentle and kind to all living things. He will not seek his own and will eschew the path of violence. With humility and patience he will seek his salvation. Love will go with him part of the way—but not all the way. The aim of the Buddhist salvation is release from the entanglement of this world of sorrows, and the way of release is the extinction of desire. When the devotee has conquered the selfish desires he must go on to rise above the unselfish, by breaking the ties which link him with his fellow men. There comes a period in the upward movement of the soul when love

must be cast aside and the solitary spirit attain alone to its Nirvana. For Buddha, love fails in the end.

After Jesus and Buddha, perhaps Plato may be said to have most profoundly influenced human thought about life and its purpose. When we follow his immortal description of the ideal city and see how he makes the good life consist in the life of the true citizen we cannot doubt that he has come near to the Christian conception of love. To serve the community in the place for which one is fitted wholeheartedly and without envy is the good and happy life. But it is not the highest life. When Plato comes to the upper levels of the soul's possibility and tells us of the activity open to the few who are capable of becoming "philosophers" we leave the city and the community behind. The highest life for man is the contemplation of eternal ideas, the passionless exercise of the pure reason. Love and service are good, but they are not final. At the supreme moment they fall away. In fact, for Plato they are tasks laid upon the good man in recompense for his own education.

Our third name shall be Mr. Bernard Shaw.

He is not so great as Plato or Buddha, but he has the advantage of being alive, and we may at least say of him that he has thought much on ethics and has summed up a view of life which is widely current. There is, moreover, probably no one now living who has influenced standards of conduct more profoundly in the English-speaking nations. In his great drama, "Back to Methuselah," he has produced a gigantic parable of his attitude towards life. In the last act he seems to be picturing for us the ultimate end and goal of human progress. Men have almost achieved immortality, they have mastered their environment and become lords of the world. On what do the "Ancients" spend their moments of unlimited time? We find that they have grown beyond the social life. Intercourse with their fellows has become irksome, and they seek a solitary existence in which to contemplate abstract truths such as the properties of numbers. It is surely a strange result that the Utopia of a philosopher of Socialism should be a condition of things where there is no society. St. Paul was a better socialist than Mr. Shaw, for he believed that charity never faileth.



This is the distinctively Christian view of life and its value. Charity never faileth. The intercourse of persons, their creative fellowship one with another, is the source of all good, and its perfection is the supreme good. To whatever height we may attain we cannot get beyond the Kingdom of God. We may pass beyond the need of revelation—prophecies may fail—we may rise above the need of learning and argument—knowledge shall be done away—but love cannot be surpassed or the need for it vanish.

We may say of this view that modern knowledge has tended to confirm its truth. In older thought it was possible to think of persons as isolated “monads,” possessing their selfhood, so to speak, in their own right. But it has become clear to modern psychology that the person and his society are really inseparable from one another. The solitary individual cannot exist. We develop ourselves by intercourse with others, we advance in the attainment of personality through fellowship, and if fellowship fails we wither and die. The Christian Gospel is therefore, in this respect, in the deepest harmony with modern insight, for it is through and



through personal and, at the same time, through and through social. It is the one world-view and life-view which takes personal life to be ultimate. Its conception of the world rests upon the belief in a personal God, its ideal for life is erected on the conviction that personality is not to be transcended but possessed in ever greater perfection.

Our western civilisation with its restless energy threatens to destroy itself because it has no common ethical ideal. We may be sure that its vigorous activity will never be captivated by an ethic of negation or be satisfied with quietism or a mysticism which seeks to rest in the blank Absolute where persons are forgotten. It needs an ethic of "life-affirmation," and in the Christian conception of the Good it may find what it needs. No Christian can think without dismay of the position of the Church in this present age, or estimate without shame the degree in which the failure of the world to accept the leadership of Christ is due to the failure of the community of Christians to present Him as He is. The brotherhood of the followers of the Way has become split up into antagonistic factions which bear no effec-

tive common witness and by their internal relations do little to show the attractiveness of love. Some of the causes of division are doubtless important, but many more could be minimised or abolished by scholarship, common sense and courage. The last word of one who writes on the Gospel in the modern world must be a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, for the effective co-operation of all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and are trying to base their lives on the conviction that love never fails.

THE END









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